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Iranian, Iraqi businessmen gather for Iftar dinner in Baghdad

TEHRAN — Officials, businessmen and entrepreneurs from Iran and Iraq gathered together for an Iftar dinner in Friday evening at the Iranian embassy in Baghdad, IRNA reported.

Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi, along with the governor of Iraq's Central Bank Ali al-Alagh and Sami al-Araji, the chairman of Iraq's National

Investment Commission (NIC), as well as heads of Iraqi chambers of commerce and representatives of private companies from both sides were among the event's attendees.

As reported, on the sidelines of the event, the two sides held talks on ways of expanding cooperation in various areas. **→4**

Over 7,200 villages to be linked with National Information Network

TEHRAN — Over 7,200 villages across the country will be connected to the National Information Network on the occasion of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Ministry announced, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The World Telecommunication and

Information Society Day (WTISD) is annually celebrated on May 17 to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and ICT can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide.

The internet coverage will expand internet-based market through providing infrastructure and ICT development. **→11**

Syria says its air defenses intercept several Israeli projectiles

TEHRAN — The Syrian army says its air defense units have brought down several projectiles fired from Israeli-occupied territories.

Syria's official news agency SANA, citing its correspondent, said that the Israeli aerial aggression occurred on Friday night.

Other reports, quoting some residents

in the Syrian capital, said several loud explosions were heard near Damascus.

SANA, in a later update, quoted a military official as saying that the projectiles came from "the direction of" Syria's southwestern province of Quneitra near the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, adding that the air defense units had "countered" them. **→13**



PERSPECTIVE
Hanif Ghaffari
Head of the Politics Desk of the TehranTimes

John Bolton's political death

John Bolton, U.S. National Security Advisor, continues to promote war and terror and violence in his foreign policy. Bolton's title is basically tied to crime, war and terror. In George W. Bush's presidency, people like Dick Cheney and John Bolton have become the messengers of the White House's defeat in the world. This time Bolton has also become a messenger for defeating Trump and the United States in the world. The U.S. National Security Adviser is having difficult days. John Bolton has not been able to achieve his goals toward the Islamic Republic of Iran. Many American analysts say the National Security Adviser to the Trump government has become the symbol of the White House's failure in the international system.

Bolton's story is a sad story for American citizens! He is today a symbol of the embarrassment of all Americans. Bolton was one of the influential officials in the country since the start of the war in Iraq in 2003, by the George Walker Bush administration until 2008 (when the neocons in the United States were at the head of the political and executive equations of the country). Bolton and his entourage have repeatedly become the symbol of the failure of the United States in the West Asia region. However, Bolton's defeat in the United States is now far broader! John Bolton, the U.S. National Security Adviser, continues his anti-Iranian negotiations in various fields. In recent months, he has been busy discussing the presence of Iran in Syria and, on the other hand, engaging in negotiations with other countries over Iran's sanctions. But the existing evidences suggest that the U.S. National Security Adviser is not going to succeed in this regard.

Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders responds to a New York Times report about the Trump administration's potential plan to send thousands of troops to the Middle East, saying national security adviser John Bolton "was one of the architects of the war in Iraq."

As Peter Bergen, CNN National Security Analyst wrote, John Bolton, President Trump's national security adviser, seemingly hasn't met a war he doesn't love. **→6**

Nigerian army opens fire on protesters demanding release of Zakzaky

TEHRAN — The Nigerian army has opened fire on protesters demanding the release of top Muslim cleric Sheikh Ibrahim Zakzaky, who has been held for four years on trumped-up allegations.

Several people were seriously injured after being shot by soldiers at the rally on Friday night.

The protesters were calling for justice for the leader of Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN), who has been held since December 2015 following a deadly raid by the Nigerian army troops on his residence in the country's northern Kaduna State.

According to press TV, Sheikh Zakzaky, who is in his mid-sixties, lost his left eyesight in the raid. His wife also sustained serious wounds while more than 300 of his followers and three of his sons were killed in the violence.

The cleric has been kept in custody along his wife and a large number of his followers ever since.



Back in 2016, Nigeria's federal high court ordered his unconditional release from jail following a trial but the government has so far refused to set him free.

Iraq will remain part of 'axis of resistance' despite foreign plots: al-Kaabi

TEHRAN — Iraq's Harakat al-Nujaba Secretary General Akram al-Kaabi says Iraq will remain part of the "axis of resistance" despite foreign-backed attempts to detach the Iraqi society from the regional developments.

"Our enemies want Iraq to be an apathetic society and not react to what is happening in our region. This goes against our beliefs," said al-Kaabi.

Al-Kaabi stressed that based on Islamic beliefs, Iraq can't be separated from the greater Muslim world and the regional "resistance axis".

"Major organizations affiliated with the Zionists, the United States and the Saudis are

managing a media war against the resistance and are seeking to target our youth and our moral values," he added.

The popular resistance force chief added that it was unfortunate that some of "Iraq's elite and leaders" had been influenced by this foreign-backed trend.

"If our positions are based on the enemy's media objectives, this will surely deviate us," he said.

The Harakat al-Nujaba leader made the statements as the United States has recently ratcheted up pressure seeking to hamper efforts of a unified front countering foreign intervention and terrorism in the region.

According to Press TV, last week, during an unannounced visit to the Iraqi capital Baghdad, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called on the Iraqi government to restrain the country's popular mobilization and anti-terror forces, saying that they posed a "threat" to U.S. interests.

Washington has also notified Iraqi officials that U.S. may even directly attack the groups without coordinating with Baghdad if it perceived any threat.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi dismissed the comments, saying that Iraq had not observed "movements that constitute a threat to any side." **→13**



REPORT
Ramin Hossein Abadian
Mehr News Agency
journalist

U.S. faking insecurity in Iraq: New strategy to push Baghdad into compliance

Apparently, the U.S. government is not going to end its suspicious and hostile actions in Iraq anytime soon. These activities have been rapidly increasing over the last five months, intensifying pressure on Iraq into yielding to the White House demands.

A few months ago, Donald Trump secretly went to Iraq and visited the American armed forces based in Ayn al-Asad in the Al Anbar province.

This visit clearly was an act of undermining the Iraqi national authority; it violated the standard politic rules and regulations and greatly offended Iraqi officials. It induced strong reactions from different parties and political coalitions in Iraq, each releasing separate statements and requesting the immediate expulsion of U.S. troops.

Such derogatory actions were repeated by Mike Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State who made an unannounced visit to Iraq.

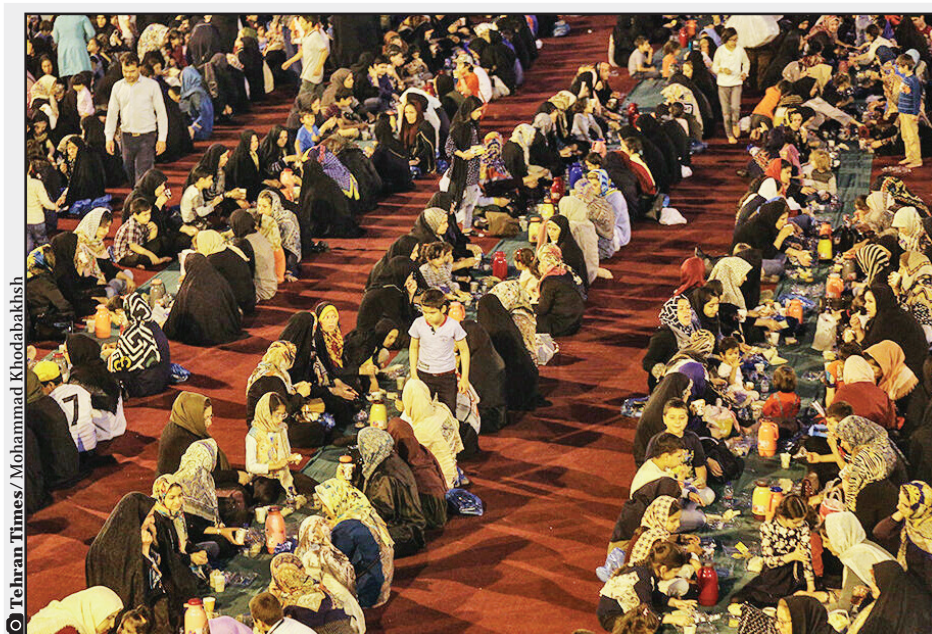
En route to Baghdad, Pompeo told reporters "I wanted to go to Baghdad to speak with the leadership there, to assure them that we stood ready to continue to ensure that Iraq is a sovereign, independent nation."

It seems that Pompeo was trying to suggest that Iran is the one who is a threat to Iraq independence and national sovereignty!

U.S. actions in Iraq doesn't stop here. Many Arab media have now exposed how U.S. have been trying to extort money from Iraq. Al-Araby Al-Jadeed announced that U.S. will give Iraq exemptions from sanctions provided that they clinch deals and agreements with American companies, worth millions of dollars.

On the other hand, Abdul-Mahdi, the Iraqi prime minister has clearly stated that his country "will not be part of the United States' sanctions against Iran," proving that U.S. "threat or reward" policy has failed in Iraq.

With such reaction, U.S. now has decided to start a new scheme in Iraq. Last Wednesday, U.S. State Department ordered all non-critical government employees to leave Iraq. **→13**



Community Iftar at Tehran's Imam Hossein (AS) square

Every day since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan (May 7), Iftar meal is being served to the public at Tehran's Imam Hossein (AS) square.

People gather around the square before sunset every day and recite verses of the holy Quran before the call to prayer.

Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast. Muslims break their fast at the time of the call to prayer for the evening prayer.

Plan to smooth production ratified

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Supreme Council of Economic Coordination convened on Saturday during which a plan to facilitate production process and removing obstacles to it were approved.

The session was headed by President Hassan Rouhani and attended by Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and Ebrahim Raeisi, the Judiciary chief.

It was also decided to facilitate repayment of debts by production enterprises in order to prevent their closure.

Communications and Information Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi presented a report on production program and supplying communications needs of the country, based on which decisions were made by the council.

Tehran welcomes Venezuela peace initiative

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran says it welcomes a peace initiative between the Venezuelan government and the opposition hosted by Norway, expressing the hope that the talks would result in a political solution.



"We hope these talks would result in a political solution between the two sides, and Venezuela could immediately improve its economy and the livelihood of its people peacefully," Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said in a statement on Saturday, Tasnim reported.

Warning against the dire consequences of foreign interference in the Latin American country's internal affairs, Mousavi said, "Unfortunately, the U.S. is collectively punishing the people of Venezuela by blocking and plundering their financial assets."

The spokesman said it is necessary that the U.S. abandon its "economic terrorism" against Venezuela and stop its "illegal behaviors" in the country "that run counter to human rights norms".

President Nicolas Maduro said on Friday that the talks in Norway with representatives of Venezuela's government and the opposition sought to "build a peaceful agenda".

According to Reuters, the representatives of each side arrived in the Nordic country this week, signaling a fresh approach to ending months of tensions that escalated after a failed uprising last month led by opposition leader Juan Guaido, who called on the military to oust Maduro.

Venezuela was thrust into a deep power struggle in January when Guaido, leader of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, invoked the constitution to assume an interim presidency, arguing Maduro's 2018 re-election was illegitimate.

Shortly after Guaido took an oath swearing himself in before his supporters, U.S. President Donald Trump recognized him as the country's leader. In response, President Maduro broke off diplomatic ties with the U.S. and expelled American diplomats from his country.

Tehran says U.S. acting against UN charter, human rights

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's envoy to the United Nations bodies headquartered in Vienna has criticized the measures taken by Washington, saying that the White House moves are in violation of all international norms and human rights.

Speaking before the 35th meeting of the member states of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) planning and budget committee on Friday, Kazem Qaribabadi said the U.S. acts are against the UN charter, international regulations and the human rights which can have destructive impacts on UNIDO activities and missions.

He also expressed concern over the unsuitable financial conditions of the UNIDO and its influence on the development plans of the body and its effective performance.

Qaribabadi urged the UNIDO managing director to spare no effort to force the U.S. to pay its €60m dues which date back to its exit from UNIDO.

U.S. pullout from international organizations does not provide any legal basis for not paying its dues to these bodies.

UNIDO's primary objective is the promotion and acceleration of industrial development in developing countries and countries with economies in transition and the promotion of international industrial cooperation.

Earlier, Qaribabadi had called on the international community to stand against the U.S. unilateralism, saying that Washington's coercive foreign policy runs counter to international law and the UN Charter.

The U.S. government is involved at a high level in unilateral and coercive measures such as imposition of sanctions, threats of use of force, military intervention, and even acts such as withdrawal from international treaties and agreements, said Qaribabadi on April 30, in his address to a ceremony commemorating the International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace. The event was held in Vienna hosted by the Non-Aligned Movement.

Earlier this week, Chairman of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations Seyyed Kamal Kharrazi said that global efforts to reach multilateralism are in serious danger as some countries are seeking to impose their will and secure their interests by withdrawing from international agreements.

At a time when certain countries consider exit from international treaties as a way to meet their desires and impose their will on others, multilateralism is not only on the decline, but also on the path to destruction, Kharrazi said last Monday, addressing the second meeting of the Paris Peace Forum.

During the meeting, major issues of the draft report of the forum were discussed when Kharrazi said that certain cases in the report need amendment.

Zarif to Trump: It is the U.S. that 'doesn't know what to think'

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said it is the United States that "doesn't know what to think" as President Donald Trump says one thing and his national security advisor says something else.

He made the remarks on Friday in a post on his Twitter account after U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that with "all of the Fake and Made Up News out there, Iran can have no idea what is actually going on!"

"The Fake News Media is hurting our Country with its fraudulent and highly inaccurate coverage of Iran. It is scattershot, poorly sourced (made up), and DANGEROUS. At least Iran doesn't know what to think, which at this point may very well be a good thing!" Trump said in another tweet.

Responding to the comments, Zarif tweeted, "With the #B_Team doing one thing & @realDonaldTrump saying another thing, it is apparently the U.S. that 'doesn't know what to think'. We in Iran have actually known what to think for millennia—and about the U.S., since 1953. At this point, that is certainly 'a good thing!'" 1953 refers to the CIA-engineered



We in Iran have actually known what to think for millennia—and about the U.S., since 1953.

coup against the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mossadegh.

Also on Friday, in a speech to the National Association of Realtors, Trump

pushed back against reports of conflict between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton amid tensions between the United States and Iran.

"Mike Pompeo is doing a great job. Bolton is doing a great job. They make it sound like it's a conflict," he said.

Zarif has classified Bolton, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (bibli), Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) as B-team who are working hard to push the U.S. toward a war with Iran.

■ Zarif says 'Israel first' replacing 'America first'

Zarif also said on Saturday that the policy of "Israel first" is beginning to replace the proclaimed "America first".

"What has been mentioned as the policy of 'America First' in that country is turning into a policy of 'Israel first' or 'certain reactionary regional rulers first,'" Zarif told reporters in Beijing.

The chief diplomat said those parties are employing "financial power and propaganda" as a leverage to impose their demands on the U.S. government.

Takht Ravanchi says U.S. must end its illegal military presence in Syria

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Majid Takht Ravanchi, Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations, has said that the United States must put an immediate end to its illegal military presence in parts of Syria.

In a statement addressed to the UN Security Council on Friday, Takht Ravanchi said that sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria should be respected by all.

Following is full text of the statement published by IRNA:

Along with other Guarantors of the Astana Format, the Islamic Republic of Iran continues to support keeping Idlib as a de-escalation area.

This approach is based on a reality and a fundamental principle: there are a large number of civilians there whose lives must be saved.

At the same time, certain questions are in order: can and should this situation continue indefinitely? Should the Government allow these internationally designated terrorist groups continue their control over its territory? Should the international community allow such terrorist groups to take a large number of civilians as their hostage?

The answer is clear: the establishment of the Idlib de-escalation area was only a temporary measure with the exclusive objective of protecting civilians, not providing terrorist groups with a safe haven. It does not limit the right of the Syrian Government to fight Security Council designated terrorists, which of course have to be carried out in accordance with International Humanitarian Law. Therefore, both, defeating terrorists and releasing civilians



are necessary.

Current situation in Idlib under which the most dangerous terrorist groups are allowed to use over two million civilians as human shields, continue their control over a large part of a sovereign State's territory, and conduct their operations therefrom attacking both military and civilian targets beyond that area cannot and must not continue indefinitely.

Persistence of this situation would enable terrorists to kill more civilians. This is in contradiction with the objective of the Idlib de-escalation area's creation. We should be vigilant enough not to confuse the protection of civilians with the protection of terrorists.

Commander stresses boosting army units' preparedness

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran's Army Commander Major General Abdulrahim Mousavi highlighted the country's full readiness to counter foreign threats and said at the current situation, boosting the Army units' preparedness is "an inevitable necessity".

Addressing a gathering of the Army commanders on Saturday, Major General Mousavi stressed the importance of boosting the vigilance and preparedness of the military commanders at all strategic and operational levels.

"Today, thank God, all units of the Army have full combat and psychological readiness and if the enemy dares to make a miscalculation or a strategic mistake, it will receive a response that would make it regret it," Major General Mousavi said. "In the current situation, maintaining and boosting the vigilance and readiness of the Army units is an inevitable necessity and would deter the enemy threats," the commander added.

The remarks came a few days after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei downplayed the United States' highly belligerent rhetoric against Iran, stressing that Washington's real capability do not match its inflated bluster.

"In (its) policy of confrontation with the Islamic Republic too, the U.S. will definitely suffer defeat, and (the situation) will



end up to our benefit," the Leader said, citing warnings by American analysts that Washington's pressure on Tehran would, contrary to its intended purpose, trigger an "economic mutation."

The U.S. has ratcheted up pressure on Iran since last year after withdrawing from the 2015 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Since then, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump is trying to reduce Iran's oil exports to "zero," and has sent an aircraft carrier strike group, a bomber squad, an amphibious assault ship, and a Patriot missile battery to the Middle East to try to stack up pressure on Tehran.

Iranian officials, however, have dismissed such moves as psychological warfare, saying the country has its own ways of circumventing the American bans and selling crude oil.

There will be no war between Iran and U.S., Zarif says

POLITICS d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif predicted on Saturday that there would be no war between the U.S. and Iran, however he said Washington should explain to the American people about its "dangerous moves" in the region.

"I am sure, as Leader of the Islamic Revolution has said, there will be no war, because neither we seek a war nor anyone can imagine any confrontation with Iran in the region. However, it is essential to clarify the U.S. dangerous moves for the people of this country," he told IRNA before leaving Beijing for Tehran.

He added, "The reality is that Trump has said and reiterated recently that he does not seek war. However, there are people around him who push him towards war under the pretext that they want to make the U.S. powerful."

Zarif noted that the U.S. priorities in politics are just in line with interests of the Zionist regime of Israel and certain reactionary countries in the region.

Tension has been increasing in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East region since the U.S. has made military threats against Iran and dispatched aircraft carrier to the regional waters and deployed Patriot missiles in certain regional countries.

Iranian officials and analysts have said the dispatch of carriers to the region are just

a "psychological warfare" against Tehran.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has ruled out the possibility of war between the U.S. and Iran despite heightened tensions between the two sides.

Speaking at a large gathering of officials on Tuesday, the Leader said Washington knows that engaging in such a conflict would not be in its interest.

The Washington Post, citing several unnamed U.S. officials, reported late Wednesday that Trump was frustrated that his advisers may be rushing into war and that he preferred a more diplomatic approach and direct talks with Iran.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said on Thursday that the Trump administration does not have congressional authorization to go to war against Iran.

She told reporters that she backed what appeared to be U.S. President Donald Trump's aversion to actual military conflict with Tehran, Reuters reported.

"Like what I hear from the president — that he has no appetite on this," she said.

She noted, "This is part of a pattern that is not right because we have responsibilities — the responsibility in the Constitution is for the Congress to declare war, so I hope the president's advisers recognize that they have no authorization to go forward in any way."

Iran able to defeat enemies in intelligence war: IRGC chief

POLITICAL d e s k **TEHRAN** — Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said on Saturday that Iran is able to defeat enemies in intelligence war.

Speaking during a ceremony, Major General Hossein Salami said the intelligence war between Iran and the U.S. is a "serious reality".

"We are involved in full-fledged intelligence war with the U.S. and enemies of the revolution and the Islamic system. This atmosphere is a combination of psychological and cyber operation, military moves and dissemination of fear," he said.

The top commander attached great importance to necessity of observing

enemies' strategies.

Elsewhere, he said that the "political philosophy" in the U.S. has led to a failure by Washington.

"The U.S. political system has suffered cracks and lost its strength," the commander noted.

He also said that Iran is on the path of empowerment.



Guardian Council reacts negatively to provincialize elections

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The spokesman of the Guardian Council on Saturday reacted negatively to the prospects of provincializing elections, saying the council deems there would be downsides to doing so.

Speaking at a press conference, Abbasali Kadkhodaei said the Guardian Council is not against provincialization “but it will lead to smaller turnout, violation of the rights of candidates and people, and go against equity in elections.” The Majlis is considering a bill that would have the collection and counting of parliamentary votes at provincial level.

Kadkhodaei said there are 10 instances of ambiguity in the bill regarding which the Guardian Council is seeking clarification. “Four instances were against Sharia while there were other instances that went against the Constitution,” he said.

Just recently the government cabinet expressed their general agreement to the provincialization bill.

Earlier this month, 15 Iranian think tanks voiced concerns over the motion to change



parliamentary elections from local to provincial level, saying the move would decrease voter turnout.

In an open letter to Parliament Speaker

Ali Larijani, the think tanks claimed the move is contrary to general election policies and would have “catastrophic” social, political, legal and security consequences.

They further said it would deepen the rift among ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, and would pose a threat against national security.

It would “block the people’s communication links with the establishment and would radicalize the public atmosphere,” they argued.

The think tanks called on the lawmakers to avoid partisanship and haste, and to make well-considered decisions in order to safeguard the country’s interests.

Also in early May, members of the principlist faction of the House of Parties criticized the plan to hold parliamentary elections at provincial level, saying the plan is “premature” and needs further study.

The principlist politicians reached a consensus in their first meeting that the plan is “ill-considered” and no “deep expert work” has been done on it.

The parliamentary election will be held on February 21, 2020.

The Guardian Council vets candidates for presidential, parliamentary, and Assembly of Experts elections and monitors elections.

Dual nationals can safely travel to Iran: diplomat



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Tehran’s Ambassador to London, Hamid Baedinejad, has said that dual nationals can safely travel to Iran.

“Every day thousands of Iranian dual nationals and Iranian nationals working in the UK are travelling safely to Iran. Iranian dual nationals and Iranians working in the UK are all respected Iranian citizens and are all welcomed to visit their country and families,” he tweeted on Friday.

His comments came as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK issued a statement on Friday advising against all travel for British-Iranian dual nationals and for Iranian nationals who work for organizations perceived as linked to UK government.

According to the statement, British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt claimed, “Dual nationals face an intolerable risk of mistreatment if they visit Iran.”

“Regrettably, I must also offer a message of caution to Iranian nationals resident in the UK – but who return to visit family and friends – especially where the Iranian government may perceive them to have personal links to UK institutions or the British government,” he added.

Pentagon cannot decide for Iran, ex-minister says



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran is a country that a few people at the Pentagon cannot decide for it, former Justice Minister Mostafa Pourmohammadi said on Saturday.

The remarks by Pourmohammadi comes as Washington has intensified its rhetoric of war against Iran followed by a harsh economic sanctions against the country.

Speaking with IRNA, Pourmohammadi said owing to Iran’s national and defensive might, it is not possible for the United States to decide about attacking the country.

“As the Supreme Leader remarked on Tuesday, neither we intend to enter a war nor the U.S. dares to wage a war without considering its ramifications,” he remarked.

“However,” Pourmohammadi added, “a madman can disturb the situation even so no[as1] rational mind would sanction a war.”

The U.S. has been deploying a policy of

“maximum pressure” against Iran under President Donald Trump.

Employing the policy, Washington left a multilateral nuclear deal last year, which was reached between Iran and six major powers – the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany – back in 2015.

It then reinstated the sanctions that had been lifted under the accord, and began threatening the countries not abiding by the bans with “secondary sanctions.”

The moves came while the nuclear deal has been ratified in the form of a United Nations Security Council resolution, making Washington culpable for violating international law.

On May 8, a year after U.S. withdrawal, Iran announced it would partially end its compliance with the deal unless European nations are able to circumvent the sanctions and provide it with benefits it was due under the accord.

Iraqi group: Military threats against Iran shows Washington’s ‘new idiocy’



POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The United States’ military threats and intensive pressure campaign against Iran shows Washington’s “new idiocy” in the region, says Jassim Al-Jazairi, a member of the political office of the Iraqi al-Kataeb movement.

“The recent pressures and moves of the U.S. against Iran shows their confusion and new idiocy,” Jassim, whose movement is affiliated to Hashd al-Shabi, said in an interview with IRNA on Saturday.

He said, “They have not learnt from their past experiences and history, and think that the Islamic Republic is a low-hanging fruit.”

The U.S. military adventures in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 have proven a fiasco.

The United States, which invaded Afghanistan to defeat Taliban, is now begging for dialogue with the militant group to find a face-saving exit from the country.

Also, military invasion of Iraq under the pretext that Saddam Hussein was hiding weapons of mass destruction, led to hundreds of thousands of deaths coupled and the spread of terrorism in the region.

Al-Jazairi said the U.S. cannot do anything against “united Iranian nation” and that most regional countries back Iran.

“If there is a war, Iran will definitely emerge victorious,” he predicted.

He added the Americans are unaware of this bitter fact that the region can no longer tolerate new crises.

Various Iraqi groups as well as religious and political figures have expressed support for Iran in the face of the Trump administration’s economic war and its threat of military force against the country.

Despite the fact that Iran supported Iraqis against Daesh, Washington is pressing the officials in Baghdad to cut economic ties with Tehran.

MP: U.S. left JCPOA because it didn’t receive economic benefits

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A top Iranian lawmaker says the Trump administration’s withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear accord was due to the fact that the U.S. didn’t receive any economic benefits from the deal, Mer reported on Saturday.

“The U.S. signed a contract which benefited the Europeans but did not bring any economic benefits to the Americans,” said Amirhossein Ghazizadeh, a member of the parliament’s presiding board. The MP also said Iran was ready to work with General Motors instead of Renault and Peugeot, or allow American oil companies to enter Iran’s oil fields.

Ghazizadeh argued that the Americans themselves were responsible for not receiving the benefits because of the sanctions they imposed on the Islamic Republic.

“Over the past 10 years, the U.S. has been putting pressure



on Iran while different European countries benefited from

Iran’s economy,” he maintained.

Ghazizadeh referred to the U.S. efforts to start negotiations with Iran by passing phone number, saying holding talks with Iran is “in Trump’s interests for the future presidential election which is tied to Iran.”

“America doesn’t know what it actually wants and how to achieve it,” he stated. Ghazizadeh went on to say that “The window of negotiation with those who have broken their international commitments is closed.”

To negotiate with Iran, he continued, the U.S. government needs to first return to the JCPOA (the official name for the multilateral nuclear deal) and honor its international obligations. “Then they can claim for a new round of talks,” he added. He also stressed that Iran is not seeking a war with the U.S. but is fully ready to defend itself and inflict heavy losses to its enemies.

Americans waiting ‘by the phone’ for call from Tehran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — An American official has said the Trump administration is waiting “by the phone” for Iran to call.

The U.S. has heard no message yet from Iran, the senior official, who declined to be identified, told a small group of reporters on Friday, according to the Wall Street Journal.

Back on May 9, Trump publicly appealed to Iran to call him amid heightened tensions.

On the same day, CNN reported that the White House has contacted Swiss authorities to share a telephone number with Iran in hopes that Tehran will contact Trump.

The call for talks came four days after John Bolton, the hawkish U.S. national security advisor, declared the U.S. was sending an aircraft carrier strike group and a bomber task force to the Middle East in a “clear and unmistakable” message to Iran.

The move, he said, is aimed at sending a “clear and unmistakable message” to Iran

that “any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force.”

Bolton said the decision was in response to what he called “a number of troubling and escalatory indications and warnings.”

Trump, however, later ordered his administration to avoid a military confrontation with Iran, The New York Times and Reuters reported Friday.

During a Wednesday morning meeting in the Situation Room, Trump sent a message to his hawkish aides that he does not want the U.S. pressure campaign against Iran to explode into an open conflict.

“Trump was firm in saying he did not want a military clash with the Iranians,” read the paper citing five senior officials who described the administration’s internal debate over Iran.

The report cited anonymous officials informed on the matter as saying that Trump had privately expressed concern that some

of his advisers, such as John Bolton, were pushing for war.

Hawks in Trump’s team have reportedly gone as far as drawing up plans for a possible military strike that could involve sending 120,000 soldiers to the Middle East.

The New York Times on Monday claimed Acting Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan had presented an updated military plan that envisioned sending as many as 120,000 troops to the Middle East should Iran attack American forces or accelerate work on nuclear program.

The New York Times’ claim was later on Tuesday denied by Trump, who described it as “fake news” and said, “Hopefully we’re not going to have to plan for that. And if we did that, we’d send a hell of a lot more troops than that.”

Later on Friday, Trump tweeted that “the Fake News Media is hurting our Country with its fraudulent and highly inaccurate coverage of Iran.”

“It is scattershot, poorly sourced (made

up), and DANGEROUS. At least Iran doesn’t know what to think, which at this point may very well be a good thing!” he added.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif immediately replied, “With the #B_Team doing one thing & @realDonaldTrump saying another thing, it is apparently the US that ‘doesn’t know what to think.’”

“We in Iran have actually known what to think for millennia—and about the US, since 1953. At this point, that is certainly ‘a good thing!’” the top Iranian diplomat added.

Zarif’s response apparently made the U.S. president soften his tone to some extent, as he later suggested that fake news are confusing Iran too.

The Iranian foreign minister has yet to continue this Twitter war of words, but Iran’s Minister of Information and Communications Technology Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said that Trump’s “mad advisors” are the source of fake news.

Bosnian parliament speaker pushes for closer ties with Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Borjana Kristo, Bosnia-Herzegovina’s House of Representatives speaker, has underlined the importance of friendly relations with Iran and called for a boost in mutual cooperation in all fields.

Kristo made the remarks during a meeting with Iranian ambassador to Sarajevo Mahmoud Heydari, IRNA reported.

She voiced hope that bilateral ties will expand with the formation of a new government in her country and establishment of parliamentary commissions.

Heydari, for his part, congratulated the election of Kristo as house speaker and presented a report on the situation of bilateral relations.

He also stressed the need for promoting parliamentary cooperation.

Commenting on Iran’s stance on the nuclear deal and the recent developments in the Persian Gulf and Middle East, he said that the Iranian nation has always abided by its commitments and responsibilities and will never surrender to threats and bullying.

STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	212750.0
IFX	2612.64

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES	
USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,923 rials
GBP	53,418 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$73.00/b
WTI	\$63.40/b
OPEC Basket	\$71.26/b
Gold	\$1,287.85/oz
Silver	\$14.53/oz
Platinum	\$827.35/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iranian, Iraqi businessmen gather for an Iftar dinner in Baghdad

➔ The two sides also emphasized the positive relations between the two countries and the Iraqi side stated that the Arab country will always stay by its good neighbor Iran.

Iranian Commercial Attaché to Iraq Naser Behzad said on Wednesday that there is no new limitation in trade relations between Iran and Iraq and the two neighbors are strongly determined to strengthen and develop their trade cooperation.



Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad Iraj Masjedi (R) shakes hand with the governor of Iraq's Central Bank Ali al-Alagh on the sidelines of an Iftar dinner at Iranian embassy in Baghdad on Friday.

In this due, the two countries are following up plans for increasing their bilateral economic relation, the official noted.

The Iranian commercial attaché further said that Iran's monthly exports to Iraq is expected to be doubled in the current Iranian calendar month (ends on May 16) from its previous month.

Going down: Brazil economic woes hit stocks, currency

Atrophying growth forecasts and waning confidence in President Jair Bolsonaro sent Brazil's stocks and currency to their lowest level of the year this week, as analysts warned of further falls.

AFP reported since touching a record 100,000 points in mid-March, the Bovespa has fallen 10 percent and wiped out gains made since far-right Bolsonaro took power on January 1 on a promise to revive Latin America's biggest economy.

The benchmark index closed just below 90,000 on Friday, while Brazil's currency traded at its lowest level against the dollar in eight months, breaking through four reals.

The sharp declines have been fanned by uncertainty over U.S.-China trade talks that has pummeled stocks and currencies in emerging markets, which are perceived as riskier bets.

But the "external headwinds" have been compounded by concerns over Brazil's feeble economy, which has struggled to grow since emerging from the devastating 2015-2016 recession, said William Jackson of London-based Capital Economics.

"There was a lot of hope when Bolsonaro came to power that the economy would turnaround, but we have seen no evidence of this," Jackson told AFP.

■ Pace of economic reforms

This week's massive nationwide protests over education spending freezes, money laundering accusations against Bolsonaro's eldest son and the slow pace of economic reforms were adding to the general malaise.

The "economy is really flirting with recession," Jackson added.

The bleak outlook was underscored by economy minister Paulo Guedes, who warned this week that Brazil was "at the bottom of the well" as he slashed the government's forecast for 2019 economic growth to 1.5 percent from 2.2 percent.

That was followed by central bank chief Roberto Campos Neto, who flagged a likely contraction in the economy in the first quarter following a slowdown at the end of 2018.

Market analysts have pared their full-year growth forecasts 11 weeks in a row and now expect the economy to expand by an anemic 1.45 percent, according to the latest central bank survey.

Some even saw that estimate as optimistic.

Marcos Casarin of Oxford Economics warned Brazil appeared headed for around one percent growth for the third year in a row.

"Brazil has never had such a slow recovery," said Casarin, attributing lackluster activity to post-recession deleveraging by the Brazilian government, businesses and consumers, which has sapped spending, borrowing and investment in the country.

"Everyone had to pay back debt at the same time."

But the risk of a technical recession -- two straight quarters of contraction -- was low.

"We are already at the bottom," Casarin noted.

"We could potentially see a double dip, but that would have to be triggered by a domestic crisis" -- such as failure to pass the pension reform bill.

Small ports can play key role in current economic condition: PMO official

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Small ports can play some key and essential role in the country's current economic condition, the ports affairs director of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Ravanbakhsh Behzadian asserted.

The official also said that developing these ports can prevent from immigration of their population to the big cities through job creation, IRIB reported on Saturday.

Transferring the operating of small ports to the private sector has been and will be

always possible and it has been already transferred to the private sector in some ports, the PMO director stated, adding that such transferring is possible provided that the ports will bring profit.

In late April, PMO Head Mohammad Rastad announced that Iran's maritime fleet has been placed on white list of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), thanks to the set of measures the country has taken to preserve and enhance maritime safety.

The official said that the measures taken



by the PMO to maintain and enhance maritime safety have led Iran to stand among the world's top countries in terms of standard and fleet safety.

"The issue of safety at sea is very important, and if ships lack the necessary standards for maritime safety, they naturally endanger the lives of people", Rastad noted.

Over \$428m allocated for agricultural mechanization this year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The head of Iran's Agricultural Mechanization Development Center said some 18 trillion rials (over \$428.5 million) has been allocated for mechanization of the country's agricultural sectors including agriculture, horticulture, livestock, poultry, aquatic, and forests.

According to Kambiz Abbasi, last year 15.4 trillion rials (over \$366 million) was allocated in this area.

The official noted that since over 95 percent of the technology and knowledge in this area is domestic, despite the U.S. sanctions most of the goals in the mechanization



Trade war could slice 1 percent off China's economic growth, top party official says

The U.S.-China trade war could slash one percentage point off Beijing's economic growth this year, a senior Chinese policymaker said on Thursday.

According to scmp.com, speaking to a group of Taiwanese businesspeople whose companies are based in mainland China, Wang Yang — one of the seven members of the elite Politburo Standing Committee — said that the government had assessed the impact of the near year-long dispute and estimated that in the worst case scenario gross domestic product growth would be one percentage point lower than expected.

Beijing had earlier set a target of 6 to 6.5 percent growth for the full year.

While Wang did not outline any plans for dealing with the fallout from the trade war, he is the first official from the top policymaking body to speak so candidly about its possible impact on headline targets.

A member of the audience at the event in Beijing said that despite the official's frank assessment, he did not seem too worried about the long-term effects of China's spat with the U.S.

■ The trade war

"Wang said that although the trade war would have an impact on the mainland's economic development, and had caused significant waves it would not lead to any structural changes," said the delegate, who asked not to be named but said he was based

in Shanghai and was a member of the Association of Taiwan Investment Enterprises on the Mainland.

"He said the most pessimistic forecast was that it would trim one percentage point off the mainland's GDP growth," the person said.

"Wang said that the authorities would not oppose Taiwanese businesses that wanted to move their operations away from the mainland (to avoid U.S. tariffs), but stressed that the vast market there offered huge development opportunities for us."

Wang, who is party secretary of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said also that the U.S. had underestimated the tenacity of the Chinese people if it thought a trade war would "bring suffering" to China, the businessman said.

With China's economy already slowing, any discrepancy between actual and targeted performance would be a significant blow to Beijing as it would hit corporate earnings and jobs, and could threaten social stability, analysts said.

Julian Evans-Pritchard, senior China economist at Capital Economics, said that if the U.S. went ahead with its threat to impose 25 percent tariffs on the \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports currently free from such duties, it would shave 0.7 percentage points off China's GDP growth.

"On top of that, there will be the indirect impact on confidence and investment, so a

one percentage point drag from the trade war seems like a reasonable guess," he said.

"But that doesn't necessarily mean that growth will decline by one percent, as we expect part of the drag to be offset by policy stimulus."

Evans-Pritchard said the impact of the recent acceleration in credit growth should take effect in the second half of the year, which would support growth and reduce the negative impact of the trade war on jobs.

■ Economic planning agency

On Friday, the National Development and Reform Commission — China's top economic planning agency — said it would continue to use measures to support growth in the private sector and among small- to medium-sized enterprises, as well as stimulating consumption in rural areas.

"We will provide more help for key groups like college graduates (to find jobs) ... and focus on solving the problem of structural unemployment," spokeswoman Meng Wei said.

"We will also strengthen vocational skills training and implement a plan to enroll 1 million people in higher vocational colleges," she said.

The U.S. and China appeared to be moving towards a trade deal until U.S. President Donald Trump — as threatened — more than doubled the tariff on \$200 billion worth of Chinese imports to 25 percent on May 10.

IMF urges Germany to cut taxes and upgrade infrastructure

The IMF has called on Germany to lower taxes on poorer households and to invest more in the country's infrastructure, as part of a broader effort to improve long-term competitiveness and help tackle economic imbalances.

As per ft.com, "Germany's economic fundamentals are sound, public and private balance sheets are healthy, unemployment is at a historical low, wages have finally accelerated, and the large current account surplus is slowly shrinking," the fund says in its annual assessment of the German economy, released on Friday.

But the report also points to a series of longer-term challenges, including an ageing population and weak productivity growth. The IMF also warns that Germany's "technological edge" is under threat, echoing widely-shared concerns that the country's carmakers and other industrial groups have been slow to respond to the digital challenge and the potential for disruption coming from electronic vehicles.



In response to these and other problems, Germany should "use the space within the fiscal rules to bolster long-term growth and help rebalance the economy". The report adds: "Priorities include lowering the burden of taxation on low-income households further while also reducing disincentives to work for secondary earners;

expanding research and development credits for companies to speed up innovation; and continuing to invest in public infrastructure."

The IMF notes that Germany has made some progress towards reducing its current account surplus — the size of which has been a longstanding irritant to trading partners like the U.S. — but cautions that more needs to be done. "Though the external surplus has come down from its peak, it remains well above the level consistent with fundamentals and is expected to remain so in the medium term," the fund says.

"This contributes to global imbalances at a time when trade tensions threaten Germany's export dependent economy. Faster wage growth, which would be consistent with the very tight labour market, could help accelerate real exchange rate appreciation and speed up external rebalancing, while also ensuring that the benefits of growth are widely shared," the report argues.

Singapore leads talks on digital economy pact

Talks started on May 17 on an agreement initiated by Singapore to advance better trade in the digital era.

As per straitstimes.com, the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), as it is called, also involves Chile and New Zealand.

It aims to tackle issues in the digital economy such as artificial intelligence governance, e-payments, e-invoicing and digital identities, said a joint statement on Friday.

The agreement is being spearheaded by the Trade and Industry and Communications and Information ministries and the Infocomm Media Development Authority.

DEPA is an opportunity to "set forward-looking standards on digital trade, and establish new international approaches to support the digital economy and trade in the digital era", said the statement.

It added that the pact will provide a benchmark for international trade rules that benefit businesses while supporting the digitalization and internationalization efforts by small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

We believe that DEPA will promote the adoption and use of digital technologies to drive cross-border trade ... this would benefit our SME customers and accounting partners, many of whom conduct business outside their geographical boundaries.

Economic ties and digital links between the three countries are also expected to be strengthened by the agreement.

The agreement was announced on Friday Trade and Industry Minister Chan Chun Sing with his Chilean and New Zealand counterparts on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Ministers Responsible for Trade Meeting in Vina del Mar, Chile.

■ Navigating international markets

Chan said businesses that are able to navigate and tap international markets in the new digital environment will have a competitive advantage.

"Singapore is a strong proponent of an integrated, global digital economy," he said, adding that the agreement with Chile and New Zealand complements Singapore's network of free trade agreements.

Tech company Xero, which provides cloud accounting software for SMEs, believes DEPA will provide huge support for its customers, with a common set of standards to facilitate secure and smooth transactions between markets.

"We believe that DEPA will promote the adoption and use of digital technologies to drive cross-border trade," said Xero's Asia regional director Kevin Fitzgerald.

"This would benefit our SME customers and accounting



partners, many of whom conduct business outside their geographical boundaries."

Zhou Junjie, e-commerce firm Shopee's chief commercial officer, called DEPA a "step in the right direction" as it will facilitate greater transparency and simplify processes in digital trade, which will enable Singapore businesses to reach customers in the region better.

IRENEX to hold 10th round of oil offering based on new guidelines

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) is going to set new guidelines for holding the 10th round of crude oil offering at Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX), IRNA reported.

After two unsuccessful offerings of light crude oil in the new Iranian calendar year (started on March 21), NIOC decided to halt the process to prepare new guidelines for the new fiscal year and then resume the offerings.

Accordingly, for the 10th round NIOC

is going to offer two million barrels of light crude at the base price of \$67.28 on May 21.

In the previous round, NIOC offered one million barrels of crude oil at the base price of \$63.36. Like the previous rounds, the least amount of sales was 35,000 barrels.

NIOC offered crude oil at IRENEX first on October 28, 2018 just few days before new U.S. sanctions on Iran's petroleum sector took effect (November 4). In the first round, NIOC could sell some 280,000 barrels of crude oil at \$74.85 per barrel. With the daily supply amount of one mil-



lion barrels, the market wrapped up by selling eight 35,000-barrel cargos of oil on the day.

Since the U.S.'s withdrew from Iran's nuclear pact in May 2018, vowing to drive Iran's oil exports down to zero, the Islamic Republic has been taking various measures

to counter U.S. actions and to keep its oil exports levels as high as possible.

One of the main strategies that Iran chose to execute to help its oil exports afloat has been trying new ways to diversify the mechanism of oil sales, one of which is offering oil at the country's stock market.

'Energy Ministry to support private renewable power plants for electricity exports'

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iranian Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said the country's renewable power plants operated by the private sector will be provided with necessary facilities to export electricity to the neighboring countries, Tasnim news agency reported on Friday.

According to the minister, the legal basis for electricity exports is provided based on the Article 49 of the Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021), and thereafter it is possible for the private investors of the renewable energy plants to sign export contracts with the neighboring countries.

"In this regard, the ministry of energy also provides the necessary facilities and provides them with a grid to facilitate the exports," Ardakanian said.

The official noted that "In return, the energy ministry will receive a payment as transmission fee which will provide



more employment opportunities, especially in the country's vast plains."

According to the Article 49 of the Sixth Five-Year National

Development Plan, "As from the first year of implementation of the plan, the government is required to take necessary measures to create a regional power hub so that the country's electricity grid will be connected to the neighboring countries from the north, south, east and west."

In February 2019, Seyed Mohammad Sadeqzadeh, the head of Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (known as SATBA) announced that Iran plans to diversify its energy exports in the current Iranian calendar year by adding electricity generated from renewable sources to the export basket.

Currently there are 700 megawatts (MW) capacity of renewable power plants installed across the Iran.

Overall, in the next five years, Iran is aiming for a 5,000 MW increase in renewable capacity to meet growing domestic demand and expand its presence in the regional electricity market.

Russia finally brings oil production below OPEC cap

A month before OPEC and allies are set to discuss the future of their production cut deal, the leader of the non-OPEC group, Russia, appears to have finally fallen in line with its share of the cuts, producing below its OPEC+ quota for the month of May.

As per oilprice.com, Russia's oil production between May 1 and 16 averaged 11.156 million bpd, Reuters reported on Friday, quoting two industry sources, which means that Moscow is now below its quota under the production cut deal.

As part of the OPEC+ production cuts between January and June, Russia is taking the lion's share of the non-OPEC cuts and pledged to reduce production by 230,000 bpd from October's post-Soviet record level of 11.421 million bpd, to 11.191 million bpd.

In the first twelve days of May, Russia's crude oil production was said to have averaged 11.16 million bpd, although the decline in production may have been the result of restricted exports via the Druzhba oil pipeline due to a contamination issue.

Last month, Russia halted supplies via the Druzhba oil pipeline to several European countries due to a contamination issue, which the Russians say was deliberate. Russian production has been curtailed because of the restricted exports via the Druzhba pipeline.

Estimates that Russia is finally within its quota under the OPEC+ deal come days before a panel of ministers from OPEC and Russia are scheduled to meet this weekend in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the state of the oil market and

review compliance with the cuts.

At this weekend's meeting, discussion could revolve around a possible production increase after the end of the U.S. sanction waivers to all Iranian oil buyers.

Talk of raising — instead of cutting — production would be in line with Russia's ambition to resume pumping more as its companies benefit from higher production as much as from higher oil prices and have seen their new field production plans stalled by Russia's commitments to the OPEC+ deals.

Stalling renewables growth raises concern about global decarbonization efforts

By Brian Murray

In 2018, for the first time this century, global growth of new renewable energy capacity did not show a year-to-year increase. While this leveling off counters a long and steady trend of increased new renewable capacity each year — capacity added in 2018 is ten times higher than it was in 2001 — it has raised concern that efforts to advance a low-carbon energy transition may be stalling at just the wrong time.

Just about any ambitious climate plan in circulation — for example, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's "1.5 degree" report and the Green New Deal resolution in the U.S. Congress — calls for massive mobilization of renewable energy investment. Though the last decade's growth in renewables is impressive, many policymakers are looking for it to accelerate rather than flatten in order to help meet long-term decarbonization targets to mitigate climate risk. Let's unpack how this development might affect such efforts.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports that new renewable energy capacity additions in 2018 were about 180 gigawatts (GW), the same as in 2017. That is roughly equivalent to 180 nuclear power plants and accounts for two-thirds of annual global capacity additions last year. The International Renewable Energy Association reports that one-third of all power generating capacity is now from renewables.

That sounds like a lot, but the actual generation that comes from a given amount of renewable capacity is lower than nuclear and fossil fuel plants because of the intermittency of renewables. Currently, renewables, including hydropower, account for just under one-quarter of global power production. The gap between renewable capacity and generation shares will narrow if energy storage and grid infrastructure investments geared toward renewable integration grow to match the scale of renewable capacity additions.

■ The renewable generation

Last year, renewable generation grew 7 percent, but this only supplied 40 percent of the growth in total global electricity demand. Consequently, global CO2 emissions from the energy sector rose by 1.7 percent, even with the impressive growth in renewables. For renewables to play a major role in curbing global emissions commensurate with the Paris Agreement, the IEA estimates that renewable capacity additions will need



to grow by over 300 GW each year between now and 2030 — or roughly two-thirds higher than last year's total.

Hydropower accounts for more than half of global renewable capacity today, but in the last decade capacity growth has been driven first by wind and now solar PV.

The big story here is last year's slowdown in solar PV's growth. As the IEA explains, global solar PV's exponential growth had been compensating for slower increases in wind and hydropower since 2015. Solar PV's growth flattened in 2018, however, as China suddenly changed its solar PV incentives to address cost and grid integration challenges.

China announced drastic cuts to support for solar developments in May 2018. Of the 97 GW of new solar capacity added last year globally, 44 GW came from China — but that actually marks a sharp decline from the 53 GW China installed in 2017.

Other factors behind last year's slowdown in renewable capacity are a drop off in wind investment in the EU and India. From 2017 to 2018, new onshore wind installations dropped almost a third in the EU. Twelve EU countries failed to install a single wind turbine last year, but the largest drop-offs came from Germany, which was down by more than half compared to 2017, and the UK. Wind industry analysts point to permitting issues, especially in Germany and France.

In India, wind installations were at 1,481 MW (down from 5,400 MW in 2016-17). Some observers blame the Ministry of New

and Renewable Energy for capping wind power tariffs at such a low price.

Zooming in to the United States reveals that the last two decades have seen tremendous growth in renewable capacity, but that growth has been uneven. The United States is adding much more renewable capacity, but not always increasing year-over-year. The U.S. added 18 GW in 2018 — up from the 17 GW in 2017, but not quite the 24 GW from 2016.

The U.S.'s growth in renewable capacity should continue through the short-term. The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) expects non-hydro renewables to be the fastest growing source of U.S. electricity generation for at least the next two years.

■ Renewable targets

Last year's stalled growth in renewable capacity is worthy of attention, but it does not by itself indicate that we have hit "peak renewable." Policies still matter — a lot — and in some places, policies have barely scratched the surface. While many countries declared renewables targets as part of their Paris Agreement pledges in 2015, some are still crafting those policies.

In the United States, national commitments have devolved to subnational actions, and yet the needle is moving toward more renewables. Harmonized national policies — whether focused directly on renewables or decarbonization more broadly — would be more efficient than the current piecemeal approach in the U.S. and could expand renewables and modify the mix considerably if adopted. Future elections

will set the tone here.

China, the world's largest energy user, is so big that whatever the Xi government and any successors choose to do with renewables will have an outsized effect at home and abroad, not just in terms of global adoption numbers but on global markets.

One thing that early adopters like Germany, the rest of the EU, and U.S. states that enacted an RPS decades ago have done is provided the scale effect necessary to bring down the unit costs of wind and solar generation dramatically, so that they can compete on par with fossil generation in many cases. It is tempting to conclude that in due time renewables will outcompete fossil generation everywhere without reliance on targeted policies whatsoever, which would certainly help scale up adoption. But that is not guaranteed.

First, energy storage technologies and grid improvements must catch up to integrate the higher levels of renewables. Both movements are underway. Second, although the average unit cost of renewables has been declining through technical improvements and scale economies, the marginal cost of generation rises as you move from the choicest spots with the least expensive land and the most productive resources to those that are more expensive and less productive. That's exactly what happened with dam construction in the United States. As the Atlantic explains, "by 1980 nearly all the nation's good sites — and many dubious sites — had been dammed."

Geographic variation in policy has ensured that we are not necessarily starting with the most productive spots and moving on from there. This means that there may be more low-hanging fruit as policies migrate to new areas, but eventually highly ambitious global targets will run into site quality and cost constraints.

Policies will continue to play an important role for renewables for the foreseeable future. Policymakers should consider whether 100% renewable targets should be the sine qua non of climate policy or if high renewables adoption mixed with other emissions-free sources and carbon capture should be part of the portfolio. Whether mandating high levels of renewables is the most cost-effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is the subject of much current debate, which I will wade into in another article.

(Source: forbes.com)

80 new power projects to be implemented in Tehran by late-June

E N E R G Y **TEHRAN** — Iranian Energy Ministry is going to implement 80 new electricity projects worth five trillion rials (over \$119 million) in the capital to get the grid prepared for passing the summer's peak demand period, IRIB reported quoting an energy official.

According to Gholamreza Khoshkholgh, the managing director of Tehran Regional Electricity Company, most of the mentioned projects are already completed and the work is underway for the rest to go operational by the beginning of summer (June 22).

The projects include renovation and expansion of power transmission lines and substations, the official said.

Khoshkholgh emphasized the need for subscribers' cooperation in order to manage the consumption in the summer period, saying "we expect people to manage their consumption in the peak hours between 12 and 16 during the summer."



According to the official, during the last year's peak consumption period, 10,182 megawatts of electricity was consumed in the capital, which is projected to increase this year by 600 or 700 megawatts.

On Friday, the Managing Director of Iran Grid Management Company (IGMC) Davoud Farokhzad said the country's total year-to-date electricity consumption has decreased by four percent compared to the last year.

According to Farokhzad, although the total electricity consumption since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year has decreased but concurrency of hot season with Ramadan has resulted in an early surge in consumption.

Asian LNG prices slip as numerous sell tenders overshadow demand

By Jessica Jaganathan

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) fell to a three-week low this week as cargoes were offered against little buying interest despite the approach of summer, when warmer weather typically boosts power generation demand.

Spot prices for July delivery to Northeast Asia slipped to \$5.35 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), down 30 cents from the previous week, several industry sources said.

Prices for cargoes delivered in June are estimated at \$5.30 per mmBtu, also down 30 cents from a week ago, they said.

Several LNG sellers offered cargoes, overshadowing limited buying interest from Pakistan and Mexico, they said.

The "European gas prices fell overnight, so that's dragging down Asian prices as well," a Singapore-based trader said.

Day-ahead prices at the Dutch TTF hub fell on Thursday on lower gas demand in continental Europe, while the spread between the Asian and European markets narrowed this week with offers for delivery of cargoes from the United States to Europe in June and July, sources said.

There were several sell tenders this week, with Egypt's natural gas company (EGAS) offering up to 13 cargoes for loading from its Iduku plant over June and July.

Angola LNG offered its second cargo this week for delivery in June, after earlier offering a cargo for late May to June delivery, trade sources said. Oman LNG has also indicated that it will have six cargoes to sell for loading over June to September.

■ Ichthys LNG plant

Australia's Ichthys LNG plant may be offering a spot cargo, while Algeria's Sonatrach may be offering a cargo through private talks, traders also said.



Indonesia's Pertamina has offered five LNG cargoes after the country's monthly exports of the fuel dropped in April to its lowest in two years. The reason for the drop in exports was not immediately clear.

Downside pressure on prices was limited by the shutdown of a pipeline for repairs in Malaysia and several buy tenders.

Malaysia's state oil and gas company Petrolim Nasional Bhd has temporarily shut the Sabah-Sarawak pipeline that feeds gas to its LNG complex at Bintulu in the state of Sarawak, which is expected to curb spot exports from the plant.

Pakistan is seeking five cargoes for delivery over July to September, while Mexican utility CFE and Chilean consortium GNL Chile are also seeking cargoes for delivery over May to August, industry sources said.

Chinese buyers were also in the market for the third and fourth quarter but at heavily discounted prices, indicating the demand may not be firm, a Singapore-based trader said. A South Korean company was also seeking a cargo for July, the trader said.

(Source: finance.yahoo.com)

Bannon confronts China with fringe theories

Global Times — U.S. far-right nationalist Steve Bannon published an article in The Washington Post on May 6, vehemently vilifying China and inciting his country to confront China. The goal of the Communist Party of China (CPC), he claimed, is “to be the global hegemonic power.” To prove his point that it was “futile” for the US to compromise, he asserted China “has been waging economic war against industrial democracies,” and the China-US trade dispute is “a fundamental clash.”

Bannon maliciously smeared China by saying that China is a “rapidly militarizing totalitarian state imprisoning millions in work camps,” and “the world is a house divided half slave, half free.” Washington and Beijing are “facing off to tip the scales in one direction or the other,” he wrote.

To rational analysts, Bannon is not just radical, but a bit insane. He is obsessed with certain resentful suspicions that the US is on a razor's edge.

With a deep racist imprint, Bannon's ideas roughly equal to those of European extreme-rightists, even neo-Nazists. Such ideas used to be outside US mainstream discourse. But his brief experiences of working at the White House got himself an unexpected opportunity to expand influence, letting his voice echo on the national stage. His extreme personality, however, kept his peers away and had him expelled from the White House.

Bannon simply has no idea about the globalized world and the complexity of major power relations. He is trying to make greed and fear the basic guidelines for US China policy.

Bannon and far-right wingers do not care at all how much pain the China-US conflicts bring to the people. The only thing they concerned about is defeating China. However, not only will a powerful China break their dreams, but a loose-minded and swaying US will also disappoint them. Although the wills that tend to prioritize American interests exist in US society, they cannot be incited by Bannon and his followers and turn into a real determination to be antagonistic toward China.

American people want high-quality goods at reasonable prices and they want peace and predictability. They don't want to see a strategic clash between the world's superpower and the second biggest power in the world. They don't want to sacrifice their life for the sake of the so-called ideals of a few zealots. The US government hit China with high tariffs. But when Washington politicians saw the plunging stock market, they rushed to release signs to ease tension. Adopting a tough approach toward China doesn't work in the US as it does not fit the theme of peace and development in the 21st century.

China-US trade war tensions have bestowed a sense of presence to Bannon. He actively launched the “Committee on the Present Danger” which obviously targeted China and has often flexed his muscles against China on Fox TV. He is an opportunist who exploits the trade war to play up to US policies and public opinion.

Bannon wrote that the US fight is not with the Chinese people but the Communist Party of China. What he fears most is China's development. Isn't he fighting the interests of Chinese people? We hope he is not the cancer cell of the US China diplomacy.

U.S. state senator hails Iran's key role in fighting terrorism in region

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — US Republican Sen. Richard H. Black, of Virginia, ruled out remarks by certain US officials that Iran has a “destabilizing and malign” role in the region, hailing the Islamic Republic for promoting peace and fighting terror groups, including the Daesh.

“Western media has accused Iran of certain ‘malign activities’ in Syria. I see nothing malign in what Iran has done in Syria. Iran's principal actions in Syria were effectively fighting ISIS and al Qaeda. But this has not pleased the US since it has interfered with our plans to topple the Syrian government,” US Republican Sen. Richard H. Black, of Virginia, told Tasnim.

He added, “From the beginning of the Syrian War, many Americans have been concerned that the war was not a domestic uprising. Instead, it was an attempt to overthrow Syria, using Wahhabi terrorists, including al Qaeda. This is ironic because the United States was attacked by al Qaeda during the infamous attacks on the Pentagon and Twin Towers, which killed 3000 American citizens”.

In 2018, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, after meeting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, claimed that the White House was deeply concerned by Iran's “destabilizing and malign activities” in the region.

“General Wesley Clark, the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, explained how plans were laid to overthrow seven countries in the Middle East during the five-year period following the 9-11 attacks in 2001. Although the time schedule has not been met, our military actions have followed those plans with disturbing regularity,” Black said.

The American senator further said, “Among the counties targeted, were Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Iran. Although President Obama's foreign policy record was extremely violent and militaristic, he appeared intent on stopping the incessant march toward war when he finalized the Iran Nuclear Agreement. However, when that agreement was renounced by the (Trump) Administration, the march toward war seemed to resume”.

He further warned against CIA's long record in launching false flag attacks across the world, and said, “The CIA has a long history of employing false flag attacks as pretexts for military action against other nations. In Iraq, for example, Secretary of State Collin Powell addressed the United Nations, waving a test tube of simulated Sarin gas, falsely claiming that Iraq had such gas and intended to use it. This, and other statements were employed by the CIA to deceive the American people and people of other nations into launching a war of aggression that had no justification whatsoever. Such false flag strategies are deeply embedded within the National Clandestine Service of the CIA and within other elements of the government.”

Elsewhere in the interview, Senator Black referred to Washington's decision to deploy a carrier group to the Middle East, and said, “The USS Abraham Lincoln was already on a routine deployment to the Persian Gulf. The only unusual moves by U.S. military forces is the possible movement of several B-52 bombers into the region”.

He added, “The extreme rhetoric about military movements is tied to vague claims of Iranian threats towards American interests in the region. Since the source of these “intelligence reports” appears to be the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad”.

1 → Bolton was a prominent proponent of the Iraq War and he has never evinced any doubt about the wisdom of that decision, telling the Washington Examiner four years ago, “I still think the decision to overthrow Saddam was correct.” By contrast, last year President Trump said the Iraq War was “the single worst decision ever made.”

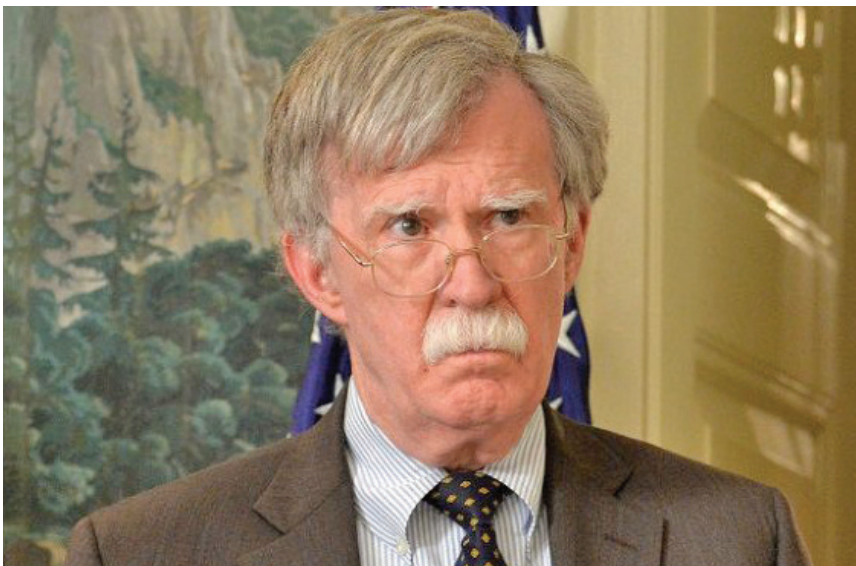
Just before he was installed a little over a year ago as Trump's national security adviser, Bolton advocated for a pre-emptive war against North Korea in the Wall Street Journal.

The US government is now ramping up tensions with the volatile North Korean regime, announcing Thursday that it had “recently” taken into custody a North Korean ship that was defying sanctions on the nuclear-armed state -- the first time the US has taken such an action.

But Trump's general approach on North Korea has been to engage in negotiations with its leader, Kim Jong Un. In recent weeks Bolton pushed for a coup in Venezuela involving opposition leader Juan Guaido that was believed to have the backing of key officers of the nation's military. The US-backed uprising seems to have fizzled. Trump has since expressed frustration to White House officials about Bolton's overly aggressive Venezuela policy.

On Thursday, President Trump said that he actually moderates the bellicose Bolton: “I'm the one who tempers him, which is OK. I have John Bolton and I have people who are a little more dovish than him.”

Bolton's enthusiasm for the muscular



use of the military seems out of place in the administration of a President who has repeatedly questioned and sought to end America's wars in the Middle East. Yet while Trump and Bolton may be out of step with each other on policy toward Venezuela and North Korea, one country they both seem to be on the same page about is Iran.

Bolton, 70, has espoused deeply conservative views since he was a teenager. The son of a Baltimore firefighter, Bolton worked on the Barry Goldwater Republican presidential campaign in 1964, and he later interned for President Richard Nixon's vice

president, Spiro Agnew. Bolton went to Yale and then to Yale Law School. He has worked in Republican administrations since Ronald Reagan's first term.

Bolton has long rejected any constraints on American power. The happiest moment Bolton had when he was working for the US State Department was when he “unsigned” the agreement that made the United States a party to the International Criminal Court, which he saw as a risk for US political and military leaders who might be charged with war crimes. After Bolton pulled the United States out of the agreement in 2002, he said

he felt like a kid on Christmas Day.

When Bolton became Trump's national security adviser, he ensured that anyone on the International Criminal Court who was investigating American soldiers or intelligence officials for possible war crimes in Afghanistan was denied visas to the United States.

Bolton's dislike of the Iranian regime is longstanding. In 2015, Bolton wrote in the New York Times that the United States should bomb Iran because “Iran will not negotiate away its nuclear program,” which is exactly what Iran did that same year when it negotiated an agreement with the Obama administration to halt its nuclear weapons program. The New York Times reported that Bolton has ordered up military options that were presented to top Trump national security officials last week. They include the potential deployment of as many as 120,000 American troops to the Middle East if Iran attacks American targets in the region or resumes work on its nuclear weapons program!

What is certain is that Bolton's political death is very close to the American National Advisor. He is doomed to failure! What is certain is that John Bolton has no choice but to confess to defeat against Iran. As we can see, John Bolton has started a full-fledged opposition to the Islamic Republic of Iran in the economic, political and regional dimensions. Donald Trump seems to have given Bolton full authorization in this regard, but he has not been able to take a practical step forward in confronting Iran.

Saudi coalition game Intl. humanitarian law in Yemen

TEHRAN (FNA) — The United Nations has confirmed that Yemen's Ansarullah resistance forces have begun their withdrawal from three Red Sea ports a good-will move to ensure relief aid to the poor and war-ravaged people.

The pullout is yet another goodwill gesture on the part of the resistance and its allies to prove to the international community that there is no military solution to the US-backed, Saudi-led conflict in the poorest country in the Arab world. It also shows that the main concern for the resistance is now humanitarian aid and dialogue, and not politics or gaming international humanitarian law.

UN teams are overseeing the Ansarullah redeployment in Saleef, used for grain, as other teams are in the second port of Ras Isa, used for oil, to implement the withdrawal. The resistance pullback is a first step in implementing a hard-won ceasefire deal, the Stockholm Agreement, reached between Yemen's pro-Saudi forces and the Ansarullah forces late last year in Sweden.

According to the Ansarullah officials, the ports were handed over to coastguard personnel who are now in charge. However, leaders of Saudi-backed forces still claim the pullout is “a flagrant show”. They go on to claim that “it's an attempt to misinform the international community ahead of a meeting of the UN Security Council.”

These statements speak for themselves. The Saudis and their allies are still not ready for dialogue and peace, despite UN warning that the country is in urgent need of international humanitarian aid. Hodeida, the fourth-largest city in Yemen and its port plays a crucial role in allowing food to be imported into the country. The UN has wanted to place the port under its control due to the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict and that's precisely why the Ansarullah forces decided to withdraw.

More than 70,000 people have been killed since Janu-



ary 2016, according to the Armed Conflict and Location Event Data Project (ACLED), a database tracking violence in the country. The US-backed war on Yemen has been at a stalemate for years, with the Saudi-led coalition and Yemeni forces unable to take over the capital Sanaa from the Ansarullah forces.

ACLED has recorded 3,155 direct Saudi-led attacks that targeted civilians and the UN figures also show that 30 percent of the civilians were either killed and wounded inside their homes, with non-combatants also targeted when traveling on roads, working on farms and at other civilian sites.

Thankfully, the number of deaths has dropped significantly in Hodeida due to the ceasefire agreement reached between the warring parties. The Stockholm Agreement lay the groundwork for peace which brought agreements on the exchange of prisoners, a truce in the vital port city of Hodeida, the establishment of humanitarian corridors in war-torn Taiz, and a handover of the three Red Sea ports

(Hodeida, Al-Salif, and Ras Isa) to the UN.

The withdrawal should now make sure humanitarian aid could be delivered to millions of civilians who are still trapped in war-torn regions of the country and in dire need of food and medical assistance.

Sadly enough, the same cannot be said about the Saudis, their coalition and the United States. After President Donald Trump's veto of the War Powers Act demand by Congress to end the illegal Yemen war, a new report from the UN Development Program says the war has also set back the poorest country in the Middle East many years. Further still, according to a new World Health Organization report, in 2018, there were more than 1.1 million cholera cases in Yemen. At least 2,310 people died from the disease, most of them children.

The Saudis and their allies should stop gaming the international humanitarian law in Yemen. The Ansarullah resistance movement's decision to withdraw from the key humanitarian corridors leaves no more excuses for the Saudi-led coalition to justify the military aggression. The UN should confront and correct their deliberate mistakes. The Saudis and their allies shouldn't be allowed to rebrand their failed campaign to prolong the unnecessary war and blockade.

The time is now for the UN and the international civil society to force the Saudis and their coalition partners to stop their campaign to ravish Yemen and reject any glorification of this immoral violence. Just like the people of Yemen, the world community should also support the Ansarullah and appreciate its decision to withdraw from a highly strategic position to ensure relief aid to the poor and war-stricken people. The continuation of the current political process could only be ensured if the ceasefire agreement in Hodeida and the delivery of humanitarian aid are observed by all parties involved.

Barrett: Trump, NZ shooter both national Zionists

TEHRAN (FNA) — Kevin Barrett, Journalist and Islamologist, says Trump and the New Zealand attacker both aim to “stoke the flames of Islamophobia” and “create and maintain a synthetic wave of fake right-wing populism in service to Zionists.”

Speaking to FNA in an exclusive interview, Kevin Barrett shed light on Trump's connection with Zionists, and discussed possible connection of the NZ attacker to Zionists, saying, “Shooter is almost certainly a paid and mind-controlled pawn of Israel... he was professionally trained and/or mind-controlled. He is known to have spent nine days in Israel... and Syrian intelligence reports claim he was known as a trained Mossad assassin who was on a watch list for presenting a threat to Syrian leadership.”

Dr. Kevin Barrett, a Ph.D. Arabist-Islamologist, is a Muslim convert author and radio host. He has taught the French and Arabic languages, African literature, English, humanities, religious studies, and folklore at colleges and universities in the US and abroad, before being blacklisted from teaching in the University of Wisconsin since 2006, due to his political views. Below is the full text of the interview:

■ How could Trump distance himself from the New Zealand shooter, when his stances like his demand to ban Muslim immigration during the 2016 campaign or his statement that “Islam hates us” all disclose his identical mindset?

A: Trump only weakly distanced himself from the alleged lone shooter. He tried to minimize the significance of the shooter's rabid Islamophobia and xenophobia by saying that white nationalism is not a growing threat and only represents “a small number of people.” But he knows otherwise, because



he got himself elected president by pandering to the Islamophobia and xenophobia of white nationalists! In fact Trump and the shooter both belong to the same global political party: the National Zionists. These phonies stoke the flames of Islamophobia for political gain and Zionist dollars. They have opportunistically taken advantage of the neocon-Zionist false flag operation of September 11 to surf the global wave of Islamophobia that those attacks were designed to elicit.

The natural enemies of real nationalists should be the Zionists, who have infiltrated, subverted, and badly damaged all of the Western nations. Indeed, it is the Zionists who orchestrated 9/11 and the 9/11 wars, which have flooded Europe with refugees. But the National Zionists are fake nationalists who deflect justifiable popular anger away from the targets who deserve it — the Zionists and

international bankers — toward the Zionists' enemies, namely, Muslims and honest leftists. They do this for Zionist pay. As Nick Griffin, the authentically nationalist founder of the British National Party has explained: “We were offered big money by Zionists in 2007 under two conditions: That we attack Islam, and never criticize the banking system.” Griffin refused; but Tommy Robinson didn't. Nor did Marine Le Pen or the other leaders of European National Zionist pseudo-populist parties. Nor did Trump. Donald Trump is reading from the same National Zionist script as Robinson and Le Pen, and for the same reason: In Ilhan Omar's words, it's “all about the Benjamins.”

■ The shooter praised Trump as “a symbol of renewed white identity”, and described Muslim immigration to NZ in the same term Trump did when expressing his

view about Muslims' immigration to the US, “invasion”. Can one claim Trump and the shooter share a common cause or purpose?

A: Trump and the shooter are both National Zionists, and therefore have a common purpose: to create and maintain a synthetic wave of fake right-wing populism in service to their Zionist paymasters. Trump's business career was created by his mentor, Roy Cohn, the kosher nostra kingpin who ran New York's political system and judiciary on behalf of J. Edgar Hoover and Hoover's real boss, Meyer Lansky. Trump's entire career as a hotel and gambling magnate was a charade. His enterprises were really money-laundering operations for organized crime. His real “Russian connection” is to the Russian Jewish mob, whose world headquarters occupies the top floors of Trump Tower. He was inserted into the Presidency by arch-criminal Netanyahu, who wanted revenge on Obama — and a free pass from the US to steal Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, and other occupied territories. Likewise the New Zealand shooter is almost certainly a paid and mind-controlled pawn of Israel and its intelligence agencies and organized crime affiliates. Witness reports and at least one video reveal that there was more than one shooter — a classic sign of a professional operation designed to be blamed on a designated patsy. The patsy's history indicates that he was professionally trained and/or mind-controlled. He is known to have spent nine days in Israel; the time he spent in Turkey seems to have included stints fighting with Israel-supported anti-Syrian mercenaries; and Syrian intelligence reports claim he was known as a trained Mossad assassin who was on a watch list for presenting a threat to Syrian leadership including the president.

Will Trump lose this time in the presidential election?

White House concerns about the Florida and Pennsylvania votes

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — Donald Trump, President of the United States, is very worried about his situation in two states of Pennsylvania and Florida. This concern continues to be strengthened! If Trump arrested the two states of Pennsylvania and Florida, Trump might have been defeated in the 2020 presidential election. Recent polls in Pennsylvania have raised concerns about Trumps:

As The Hill reported, A new poll shows former Vice President Joe Biden has opened up a big lead over President Trump in Pennsylvania, a Rust Belt battleground state that will play a pivotal role in determining the outcome of the 2020 election. A state-level survey by Quinnipiac University finds Biden at 53 percent and Trump at 42 percent in a head-to-head match-up in Pennsylvania. Trump has a narrow 4 point advantage among male respondents, but Biden holds a 24 point lead among women -- 60 percent to 36 percent. Among white voters, Biden leads 49 percent to 45 percent, but he leads among nonwhite voters by a whopping 70 percent to 27 percent. Trump and Biden pulled at least 90 percent support from within their own parties, while the former vice president held a 14 point advantage among independents, leading 51 percent to 37 percent.

"More than half of Pennsylvania voters say they are better off financially than they were in 2016," said Mary Snow, the polling analyst for Quinnipiac University. "But the economy isn't giving President Donald Trump an edge in an early read of the very key Keystone State."

Trump edged out Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in Pennsylvania by less than 1 point in 2016, making him the first GOP presidential nominee to carry the state since 1988. Trump also won in two other traditionally blue states -- Michigan and Wisconsin -- that have made up the Democratic "blue wall" in the Rust Belt and Midwest. Those three states will be a central focus for both parties in the 2020 general election. Biden, who is from Scranton, Pa., held his first campaign rally in Pennsylvania last month at a union hall. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) also leads in a head-to-head matchup against Trump in Pennsylvania, 50 percent to 43 percent. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) held a smaller lead over the president, 47 percent to 44 percent. Sen. Kamala Harris (D-Calif.) and Trump split in their hypothetical head-to-head contest, at 45 percent each. Trump is essentially running even with former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-Texas) and South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg (D). Trump's approval rating is deep underwater in Pennsylvania -- 54 percent of respondents disapprove of him while 42 percent support him.

White voters are evenly divided over the job Trump has done, but nonwhite voters disapprove by a margin of 74 percent to 23 percent. A slim majority of men approve of Trump's job performance while 62 percent of women disapprove. Still, 54 percent of voters in the state say they're better off financially



Donald Trump, President of the United States, is very worried about his situation in two states of Pennsylvania and Florida. This concern continues to be strengthened! If Trump arrested the two states of Pennsylvania and Florida, Trump might have been defeated in the 2020 presidential election.

than they were in 2016. Only 21 percent said they are worse off. Seventy-one percent of Pennsylvanians describe the economy as "excellent" or "good." The Quinnipiac University survey of 978 Pennsylvania voters was conducted May 9-14 and has a 4.2 percentage point margin of error.

What are polls in Florida?

An overview of the recent polls in Florida also shows that Donald Trump does not have a good status in this important and decisive state. Florida Residents' opposition to Donald Trump's re-election as president of the United States is the worst possible news for him. In the 2016 presidential elections, Trump won the rival Democratic Party in states like Florida, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan. However, it seems that if the Presidential elections are held today in the United States, These important and decisive states are becoming signs of the defeat of Trump.

As Politico reported, Donald Trump is in trouble in Florida, a state that's crucial to his reelection hopes. Just 40 percent of Florida voters said they believed the president should be reelected, while 53 percent were opposed to a second term, according to a new Bendixen & Amandi International poll. Trump's approval ratings were also poor, with 43 percent having a favorable impression of Trump, and 52 percent viewing him unfavorably -- and 46 percent very unfavorably.

Trump's approval ratings look even worse when compared with the man he helped make Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, who has a 50 percent approval rating while only 23 percent disapprove.

"Trump is in trouble," pollster Fernand Amandi said, noting that 23 percent of all Florida Republicans said he doesn't deserve reelection. "When that many people from your own party don't support you, it means you have to spend more time consolidating your base." With numbers like that in the nation's largest swing state -- one that Republicans typically need to win to capture the White House -- Amandi says it underscores that Florida is in play for Democrats, despite the party losing the past three top-of-the-ticket races in the state. "This idea that we need to re-evaluate Florida as a swing state is utterly disproved by this poll," said Amandi, who conducted the survey.

The former president's stature among Florida Democrats has given former Vice President Joe Biden an edge in the crowded primary, where Amandi says the "Obama effect" is reflected in his relatively strong standing among nonwhite voters. Biden would enter the Democratic presidential primary as the clear front-runner in Florida, according to the poll. Biden is supported by 26 percent of Democrats, followed by Vermont Sen. Bernie

Sanders at 11 percent and California Sen. Kamala Harris at 9 percent. The other 14 Democratic candidates and hopefuls barely registered. And 46 percent were undecided.

"Biden begins with a groundswell of support," said Amandi. "Biden has a solid base of support that cuts across all demographics -- age, race and ideology -- in all corners of the state." Amandi, who typically surveys for Democratic candidates, did not poll head-to-head matchups between Democrats and Trump. Biden's lead over Sanders is bigger among African-American and Hispanic voters, whose lack of support for the Vermont senator in the 2016 Democratic presidential primary helped Clinton crush him in Florida. Sanders struggled with nonwhite voters in a number of primaries, especially in the South, but his campaign has shown signs he's reaching out to them more in 2020.

Despite having appeared on the Florida ballot in 2016, Sanders is barely ahead of Harris in the poll. Her third-place standing and near tie with Sanders for second is a sign that the relative newcomer -- who has never been on a Florida ballot and has made few high-profile appearances in the state -- has capitalized on earned media since her recent campaign launch. When Democrats were first asked an open-ended question about their candidate of choice, Harris was named by 4 percent, Sanders by 5 percent and Biden by 11 percent. All others were at 1 percent.

As the only black woman in the race, Harris could also be well-positioned for a boost from the state's African-American voters, who can account for about 28 percent of the ballots cast in a Democratic primary. Harris' standing now resembles that of Andrew Gillum, who rocketed from unknown to rising star in the Democrats' 2018 gubernatorial primary due to the strong backing of black voters. The only other black top-tier candidate in the race, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker is polling at 1 percent. Amandi said the poll also calls into question whether Florida Democrats have to veer to the left, with 39 percent describing themselves as moderate, 32 percent saying they're progressive or liberal, and 21 percent calling themselves conservative.

"There's this conventional wisdom that this election is a referendum on the rise of the progressives in Florida," Amandi said. "But Democratic voters aren't embracing the liberal or progressive label."

Will the game change in Pennsylvania and Florida?

What is certain is that US President Donald Trump has about a year to change the equation in Florida and Pennsylvania. The publication of recent polls in the state of Florida suggests that Trump will face a tough run in the 2020 presidential election. If the president of the United States can not repeat the results of the 2016 presidential election in these two fatal states, Biden (likely to be a Democrat nominee) may well be in competition with Trump. The breakdown is a nightmare for him.

U.S. carrier group on routine naval patrol in Mideast: analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An Irish political commentator described the deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force to the Middle East as a violation of international law, adding that the carrier group had already been assigned to a routine naval patrol in the Persian Gulf weeks ago.

"The deployment of such a large military force in such an aggressive manner towards Iran is in itself arguably a gross violation of international law and the United Nations' Charter. There are indications that the USS Abraham Lincoln strike carrier group was already assigned to a routine naval patrol in the Persian Gulf from weeks ago when it left Norfolk, Virginia. Therefore, the comments by Bolton may be somewhat disingenuous and opportunistic. The deployment may not be specifically activated by US claims against Iran," Cunningham told Tasnim.

Finian Cunningham (born 1963) has written extensively on international affairs, with articles published in several languages. Originally from Belfast, Ireland, he is a Master's graduate in Agricultural Chemistry and worked as a scientific editor for the Royal Society of Chemistry, Cambridge, England, before pursuing a career in newspaper journalism. For over 20 years he worked as an editor and writer in major news media organizations, including The Mirror, Irish Times and Independent. Now a freelance journalist based in East Africa, his columns appear on RT, Sputnik, and Strategic Culture Foundation.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ Last Sunday, the White House made an announcement that the USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force were being deployed in response to unspecified "troubling and escalatory indications and warnings." What is your take on the deployment?

A: The deployment of such a large military force in such an aggressive manner towards Iran is in itself arguably a gross violation of international law and the United Nations' Charter. There are indications that the USS Abraham Lincoln strike carrier group was already assigned to a routine naval patrol in the Persian Gulf from weeks ago when it left Norfolk, Virginia. Therefore, the comments by Bolton may be somewhat disingenuous and opportunistic. The deployment may not be specifically activated by US claims against Iran.

Nevertheless, the rhetoric about directing the military force towards Iran now is reprehensible and could merit a prosecutable case for unlawful aggression by the United States. It is outrageous belligerence that should be condemned internationally by the UN, European Union, Arab League, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and various human rights groups -- if they had any integrity. The fact that the aggression of the US is met with such international silence and acquiescence shows, regrettably and disturbingly, the inequity of this world where warmongering rogue conduct by Washington is granted impunity.

Bolton, Pompeo and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu are idiots and ignoramuses, who, despicably, have personal control over immense destructive power. Their hatred of Iran is unfathomably irrational and propagandized. Deplorably, these people are permitted to create policies of aggression which could lead to a catastrophic war. Bolton's warmongering and his odious lying in the service of warmongering goes back decades to the US criminal, genocidal war on Iraq. In a sane and just world, Bolton should be in prison for life as a convicted war criminal. There is limited value in trying to understand this person's logic. He is a psychopath, as no doubt are Pompeo and Netanyahu. Interestingly, there seems lately to be a divergence between Trump and Bolton with regard to US hostility towards Venezuela. Also Trump is talking at least superficially about perhaps holding negotiations in the future with the Iranian leadership. We shouldn't base too much on this Trump overture. But the point is Trump does not seem to be as hellbent belligerent as Bolton or Pompeo are towards Iran (or Venezuela). In other words, Trump is being led towards war by idiots. If Trump had any semblance of rationality (a faint hope, admittedly), he should sack Bolton and Pompeo. It is abominable that such irresponsible psychopaths should have so much control over US policy and the fate of millions of lives.

■ The deployment of the warship was based on claims of a possible attack on US forces stationed in the region. So far, there is little detail from the Americans of the alleged Iranian actions that have prompted this warning nor of the specific US deployments underway. It seems that the Trump administration is looking for pretexts to wage war. How do you see this? What is the goal of the administration?

A: Definitely, the vagueness and subjectivity of the US intelligence claims against Iran seem to be a blank cheque for American militarism. The claims are ridiculous and contemptible, especially coming from a documented lying warmonger as Bolton. It seems incredible that the US warmongers could be so deluded as to actually contemplate starting a war with Iran, given Iran's formidable military power. The ratcheting up of American rhetoric may, therefore, reflect reckless arrogance as to their belief in being able to intimidate other nations. Of course, Washington wants to instigate regime change in Tehran. But it is not clear if Washington would be willing to go to full war for this objective. It could be all bluster and over-reaching in the self-deluded sense of one's power. Hubris before the eventual fall perhaps.

■ Many critics of the administration fear a developing drumbeat towards a conflict which, they fear, could erupt either by accident or by design. Iranian state and military officials have repeatedly stressed Iran will never start a war and it will only defend itself. What are your thoughts on this?

A: Iran's principle of self-defense is admirable and disproves the slander by Washington claiming Iranian aggression. But the situation is on a despicable knife-edge, concerning economic warfare against Iran, and US threats of military attack. Iran's principles of self-defense may be breached owing to the unrelenting and very real aggression already being inflicted by the US regime and its psychopathic policymakers. It is Washington that bears full responsibility and culpability for creating this appalling knife-edge situation. Iran is being tried with a torturous situation. If Iran unleashed military force now, it would be understandable and righteous given the unrelenting aggression it is being subjected to by the US regime. But for the sake of world peace, should Iran hold on to perseverance and stoically wait for the US regime to bury itself from its own collapsing empire of hubris and criminality?

Iran only major obstacle to U.S. hegemony in Mideast: analyst

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — An American political analyst and academic said the US government is marshalling all its forces to contain Iran's influence in the region as the Islamic Republic is the only "major obstacle to US hegemony in the Middle East".

"Bolton, Pompeo, and many others within Trump's inner circle are rabid Zionists. They plan on consolidating US Imperialist control of the Middle East through the agency of Israel and Saudi Arabia. The major obstacle to US hegemony in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran. The US is marshalling all the forces it can muster to combat Iranian influence in the region," Dennis Etler, a professor of Anthropology at Cabrillo College in Aptos, California, told Tasnim. Following is the full text of the interview.

■ Late Sunday night, the White House made an announcement that the USS Abraham Lincoln and a bomber task force were being deployed in response to unspecified "troubling and escalatory indications and warnings." What is your take on the deployment?

A: The Trump Administration is ratcheting up a full spectrum assault against Iran. Pressure is being applied diplomatically to isolate Iran within the international community of nations, economically with sanctions and an oil embargo and now militarily with these deployments. The unspecified "troubling and escalatory indications and warnings," are fabrication of Israeli intelligence and serve as a pretext to escalate US attempts to destabilize Iran and foment regime change.

■ A statement from National Security Adviser John Bolton said the deployments were intended "to send a clear and unmistakable message to Iran that any attack on United States interests or on those of our allies will be met with unrelenting force." Why do you think Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Israeli PM are pushing the US into a war with Iran?



Bolton, Pompeo, and many others within Trump's inner circle are rabid Zionists. They plan on consolidating US Imperialist control of the Middle East through the agency of Israel and Saudi Arabia. The major obstacle to US hegemony in the Middle East is the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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The Tehran Times new pocket-sized glossary is now available on the market. The reader-friendly is a rich source of the most common journalistic terminology collected by the daily's retired staff.

It can benefit a wide range of tastes from students to professional journalists. Persian equivalents have been given for all entries, including idioms and expressions. The glossary also includes example sentences for entries the authors thought it would be a bit difficult to learn.

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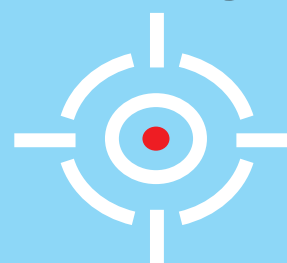
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Scientists boost the carbon-capturing abilities of metal-organic frameworks

Metal-organic frameworks are metal compounds with lattice structures that boast nano-sized pores. These pores are quite adept at filtering a variety of chemicals out of water solutions, including heavy metals, hydrogen and even gold.

But metal-organic frameworks, or MOFs, are less effective at gas separation -- until now, that is. Scientists in Switzerland have found a way to make MOFs lattice more rigid, helping the materials capture and separate gas molecules.

In a way, metal-organic frameworks were too good at trapping molecules.

“The flexible ‘lattice’ structure of metal-organic frameworks soaks up gas molecules that are even larger than its pore window making it difficult to carry out efficient membrane-based separation,” Kumar Varoon Agrawal, researcher at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne, said in a news release.

To make the lattices of metal-organic frameworks more discerning, scientists

deployed a new technique called “post-synthetic rapid heat treatment.”

In the lab, scientists exposed a common MOF called ZIF-8, or zeolitic imidazolate framework 8, to temperatures of 360 degrees Celsius for only a few seconds. The treatment worked to strengthen the chemical bonds of the MOF and stiffen the material’s lattice structure.

After the treatment, the MOF demonstrated improve carbon capture abilities. Scientists expect the new material to be used to prevent carbon dioxide produced in industrial facilities from entering the atmosphere. But the new technology has a variety of gas-separating applications.

“Rapid heat treatment is an easy and versatile technique that can vastly improve the gas-separation performance of the MOF membranes,” said Agrawal. “By making the lattice rigid, we can efficiently carry out a number of separations.”

Scientists described their breakthrough this week in the journal Advanced Materials.

(Source: UPI)



Study reveals the secrets of cell size control

New research has revealed the mechanism cells use to control their growth and maintain their size, a phenomenon known as “cell size homeostasis.”

“Cell size homeostasis is a fundamental biological question and to our knowledge this is the first time we finally understand its mechanistic origin,” Suckjoon Jun, a biophysicist at the University of California, San Diego, said in a news release. Jun and his colleagues previously showed that cell size is controlled by something called the “adder principle.” The researchers showed cells grow by a fixed added size, irrespective of their birth size.

The adder principle proved cells don’t control growth

through a sense time and space, but it failed to explain the exact mechanisms that allows for size homeostasis.

The latest research -- published this week in the journal Current Biology -- showed cell size homeostasis is made possible through two main components: the balanced synthesis of essential biological ingredients, proteins necessary for cell division, and a critical threshold that triggers the adder process once all the ingredients have been assembled.

The two components make the adder principle possible.

“It’s a very robust mechanism because each cell is guaranteed to reach its target cell size whether it is born large or small,” said Jun. “The bottom line is that we found

the adder is exclusively determined by some key proteins involved in cell division.”

Jun and his colleagues observed the mechanisms in a pair of bacteria species, Escherichia coli and Bacillus subtilis, but estimate the same components ensure cell size homeostasis in all living organisms.

Researchers credited the power of interdisciplinary collaboration with their breakthrough discovery.

“We would not have been able to solve this with pure physics or pure biology. It was a very multidisciplinary approach,” Jun said.

(Source: UPI)

Exoplanet-hunting CubeSat photographs Los Angeles

NASA’s smallest exoplanet-hunting satellite, the CubeSat ASTERIA, recently captured photographs of Los Angeles from 250 miles above Earth’s surface. The space agency’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory published the photographs on its website this week.

ASTERIA, short for Arcsecond Space Telescope Enabling Research in Astrophysics, is a miniaturized satellite made up of six cubed units measuring 4.5 inches on each size. Most of the time, ASTERIA is pointed away from Earth, searching for alien worlds in the Milky Way, far beyond our own solar system. But in March, the CubeSat trained its camera on the City of Angels.

The newly published photos reveal Los Angeles’ grid of city streets and freeways -- lots and lots of freeways -- glowing in the night.

On the evening that ASTERIA snapped the photograph, the hometown Dodgers were playing the Arizona Diamondbacks. Dodger Stadium can be seen in the image, a bright spot at the center of the photo.

Jet Propulsion Laboratory, where ASTERIA was designed and built, in Pasadena, seen in the top right quadrant of the photo, just below the darkness of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Last year, ASTERIA passed a number of tests proving its exceptional pointing



stability. Currently, the miniaturized satellite is scanning the skies in search of exoplanets.

ASTERIA is designed to hunt for planets using the same strategy as Kepler and NASA’s newest plane-hunter, TESS. The CubeSat records images of bright Sun-like stars. These observations are then analyzed for evidence of periodic dimming, the signature created by orbiting exoplanets as they move across the face of their host star.

“The extended [ASTERIA] mission also provides long-term validation of hardware and software for use on future projects,” according to NASA.

(Source: UPI)

Antarctic instability “is spreading”

Almost a quarter of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet can now be considered unstable, according to a new assessment of 25 years of satellite data.

By unstable, scientists mean more ice is being lost from the region than is being replenished through snowfall.

Some of the biggest glaciers have thinned by over 120m in places.

Losses from the two largest ice streams - Pine Island and Thwaites - have risen fivefold over the period of the spacecraft observations.

And the changes have seen a marked acceleration in just the past decade.

The driver is thought to be warm ocean water which is attacking the edges of the continent where its drainage glaciers enter the sea. The British-led study has been presented in Milan at the Living Planet Symposium, Europe’s largest Earth observation conference. It has also been published concurrently in the journal Geophysical Research Letters.

The overview stitches together the data from four overlapping satellite missions of the European Space Agency (Esa) - ERS-1, ERS-2, Envisat and Cryosat.

These spacecraft were all launched with radar altimeters to measure the change in height across both the eastern and western sectors of the ice sheet.

Their unified record from 1992 to 2017 was then combined with weather models to tease apart the elevation trends due to short-term variations in snowfall from those longer-term shifts in ice mass resulting from melting and iceberg calving.

“Using this unique dataset, we’ve been able to identify the parts of Antarctica that are undergoing rapid, sustained thinning - regions that are changing faster than we would expect due to normal weather patterns,” said Dr Malcolm



McMillan from Lancaster University and the UK’s Centre for Polar Observation and Modelling.

“We can now clearly see how these regions have expanded through time, spreading inland across some of the most vulnerable parts of West Antarctica, which is critical for understanding the ice sheet’s contribution to global sea level rise,” he told BBC News.

If West and East Antarctica are considered as a whole, this contribution is 4.6mm over the study period. It would have been more than a millimetre higher still had the eastern sector of the ice sheet not gained mass slightly over the period.

Even so, the observed losses in the west mean that the continent’s input to the ever rising surface of the world’s oceans is now tracking towards the upper end of projections.

The computer models contained within the last major assessment from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) foresaw, in the central range, 5cm of sea-

level rise coming from Antarctica by 2100.

As things stand, it’s likely to be another 10cm higher, says CPOM colleague and lead author on the paper, Prof Andrew Shepherd from Leeds University.

“There is a 3,000km section of coastline - including the Bellingshausen, Amundsen and Marie Byrd Land sections - that is clearly not properly modelled because that’s where all the ice is coming from, and more ice than was expected,” he explained.

“So, we need to go back to those models to try to understand what part of the signal they’re not capturing. And, certainly, the altimeter data, which gives a very detailed description of the imbalance, should be the first thing people refer to.” There is now a concerted international effort to investigate the most rapidly changing areas.

This past expedition season saw a UK-US-led mission to gather geophysical information from the ocean in front of Thwaites Glacier. Repeat expeditions to the ice surface are planned for coming seasons.

Thwaites, and its neighbour Pine Island Glacier, appear to be the Achilles heel of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.

Sited in the Amundsen Sea sector, they account for by far the largest signal of imbalance. About 50% of their drainage basins are now losing mass, at average rates from 1992 of 28 billion tonnes a year at Pine Island and 46 billion tonnes a year at Thwaites.

But it is the acceleration that is telling, say the scientists.

Between 1992 and 1997, the loss rates were 2 billion tonnes per year and 12 billion tonnes per year, respectively. During the latter period of the survey (2012 to 2016), the rate rises to 55 billion tonnes and 76 billion tonnes per annum. (Source: BBC)

Scientists release latest findings on ancient object at the solar system’s edge

As the ball dropped in Times Square this New Year’s Eve, the New Horizons spacecraft was fast approaching an approximately 20-mile-long space rock nicknamed Ultima Thule, located a whopping 4 billion miles from Earth. As the spacecraft zipped past the tiny world, it deployed a suite of seven scientific instruments to gather a treasure trove of images and measurements, which it has been slowly sending back to Earth for months.

The data dumps will continue until the summer of 2020, but today scientists published their latest findings, based on the 10% of the

captured data that had been transferred by March 1. Overall, the new findings paint a vivid picture of a tiny, cold and distant world that has likely changed little since it formed during the earliest days of the solar system, about 4.5 billion years ago.

Some of the most significant results have to do with the shape of Ultima Thule, wrote Alan Stern, the principal investigator for New Horizons, in an email to Inside Science.

The earliest images from the spacecraft showed that the object has two distinct sections joined together, a shape that scientists calculated likely resulted from a relatively

gentle collision. Later images and analysis revealed the two lobes are also flattened, with the larger lobe (called Ultima) more pancake-like than the smaller one (called Thule).

Scientists don’t yet know what caused the flattened shape, but offered several possible explanations. One is that Ultima formed from an already flattened cloud of particles. Others suggest that it was created in a head-on collision of two similarly sized objects, or was deformed as it spun rapidly, or even that it was pulled on by the gravity of another object before it merged with Thule.

“These discoveries have strong implications for how planetesimals and hence planets form,” Stern wrote.

The researchers also found that Ultima Thule sports a uniform red color, likely from irradiated ice and organic molecules on its surface. Scientists found evidence for the presence of both water ice and methanol. Thule is marked by a depression about 4 miles wide, named Maryland, which probably formed from an impact with another object, but overall the two lobes have only a small number of craters for objects so old.

(Source: Inside Science)

Bedbugs date back to the time of the dinosaurs, new family tree suggests

Bedbugs are more than just the sneaky appleseed-size blood suckers that have made travelers paranoid about their hotel beds. About 100 species, some living deep inside caves that humans rarely enter, plague bats and birds. Now, scientists have used DNA from more than 30 species to create the first bedbug family tree, and it is full of surprises: For example, the insects are far more ancient than previously thought, dating back to the time of the dinosaurs. And even though researchers can’t say what creature was the lucky recipient of the first bedbug bite, they now know that at least three different kinds came to love human blood over time.

Scientists have recently made progress detailing the evolutionary histories of insects like stink bugs, kissing bugs, and assassin bugs, says Christiane Weirauch, a systematic entomologist at the University of California, Riverside, who was not involved in the new study. But “with bedbugs we have not done too well.” Many species are parasites of bats, and researchers had long assumed that these mammals were their first victims. But bat bedbug species are hard to collect: Many are never found except in the depths of caves where bats roost. “You don’t know how difficult it is to get some of these bedbug species,” Weirauch laments.

That inaccessibility didn’t stop Klaus Reinhardt, whose interest in bedbugs has led him to write two treatises about the cultural history of bedbugs. For the bedbug family tree study, this entomologist at Dresden University of Technology in Germany and colleagues got some of their specimens from museums and other researchers. But the rest they chased down in areas plagued by civil war, and in hot, dark caves, where they traipsed through knee-deep guano—only after dealing with all the red tape needed to get permission to work on endangered bats. Once they had collected thousands of bugs, they sequenced and compared DNA from 34 species to build the family tree.

They used a 100-million-year-old fossil and estimated mutation rates to calculate when bedbugs first appeared and when they diversified. That work revealed that bedbugs “existed long before any records of bats,” says Thomas Lilley, an ecophysicologist at the Finnish Museum of Natural History in Helsinki. The oldest known bat fossil is just 64 million years old, and, according to the new study, bedbugs date back 115 million years, to the time of the dinosaurs, Reinhardt and his colleagues report today in Current Biology. “This is something that people have suspected, but it’s really nice to have it in black and white,” Weirauch says. Also, it now appears that those first bedbugs evolved from an ancestral bug that was already a blood sucker—some researchers thought blood meals came later, after bedbugs had already split from their ancestors.

The new family tree also upends ideas about bedbugs and humans. Two species of the insect—Cimex lectularius and the tropical C. hemipterus—typically bite people. Previously, researchers proposed that the two types arose from a common ancestor and diverged about 1.6 million years ago when Homo sapiens split off from an ancient human line, H. erectus. But the new study indicates the two bedbugs went their separate ways 47 million years ago, meaning both must have independently shifted to a human diet.

Since then, one or two other bedbug species have switched to human hosts, Reinhardt says. For example, his research on Hopi legends has convinced him that a bedbug known to infect eagles also started to feed on humans. And the human-loving bedbug Leptocimex boueti, which also enjoys bat blood and likely had that mammal as its first host, may have switched to people as global guano mining increased. Together, the evidence suggests “a new species of bedbug conquers humans about every half a million years,” Reinhardt says. Given the ever-growing contact among people, livestock, and wildlife, “It may not even take half a million years,” for another bedbug to start sucking human blood, he adds.

Bedbugs’ host-switching success suggests they are incredibly good at adapting to new situations, notes Coby Schall, a behavioral ecologist at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, who was not involved with work. “Bedbug populations rapidly adapted to global travel, other changes in human behavior, and [insecticides].” And, he predicts, they will continue to do so.

(Source: sciencemag.org)

Peacock spiders’ superblack spots reflect just 0.5 percent of light

Male peacock spiders know how to put on a show for potential mates, with dancing and a bit of optical trickery.

Microscopic bumps on the arachnids’ exoskeletons make velvety black areas look darker than a typical black by manipulating light. This architecture reflects less than 0.5 percent of light, researchers report May 15 in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B.

The ultradark spots, found near vivid colors on the spiders’ abdomens, create an “optical illusion that the colors are so bright ... they’re practically glowing,” says Harvard University evolutionary biologist Dakota McCoy.

Male peacock spiders swing and shake their brilliantly colored abdomens during elaborate mating displays. Pigments produce the red and yellow hues, but blues and purples come from light interacting with hairlike scales.

Black areas on the spiders contain pigment, too. But scanning electron microscopy also revealed a landscape of tiny bumps in superblack patches on Maratus speciosus and M. karrie peacock spiders. In contrast, all-black, closely related Cylistella spiders have a smooth texture.

Using simulations, McCoy and colleagues showed that the bumps make dark spots appear even darker in several ways. Curved surfaces bounce light around, so less is reflected, and diffract light in a way that it evades the field of view of an onlooking female. And the bumps are microlenses — angling entering light so that it takes a longer path and spends more time interacting with light-absorbing black melanin pigment than it would if the surface was flat.

The spiders’ luxe looks resemble that of birds of paradise, which also use tiny structures to create ultrablack feathers. But the animals evolved their abilities separately, the researchers say. And the phenomenon may not be so rare. There is evidence for superblack shades in snakes, a type of beetle and a variety of other birds, McCoy says.

(Source: sciencenews.org)

‘Dutch Venice’ bolsters its bridges

A village known as the “Dutch Venice” is shutting its canals for several hours each morning to repair the damage tourist boats have caused to its historic bridges.

Hundreds of thousands of visitors flock to Giethoorn in the eastern Netherlands each year, attracted by its network of canals, but many of them have trouble handling their hire boats and end up bumping into the bridges, the regional broadcaster RTV Oost reports.

The bridges are the private property of the 2,600 villagers, and they depend on them to get about car-free Giethoorn, much of which is only accessible by boat or on foot.

“There is a love-hate relationship with the visitors,” according to the NOS national broadcaster, which says that the income is welcome but “tourists walking through their gardens and looking in through their windows” less so.

■ ‘Whisper boats’

Last year Giethoorn hired an “environment director”, who tries to balancing the demands of tourism with the needs of the permanent residents. Companies offer canal tours with experienced captains, but many visitors prefer to hire private “whisper boats”.

Their electric engines are much quieter than conventional outboard motors, but they still lead to accidental collisions on the often-congested waterways, and these are weakening many of the bridges.

Last year the council installed new mirrors on the canals to help skippers see what’s just around the corner, but now it has decided to take the major step of reinforcing the bridges with extra posts and cross-beams.

The job is more complex than it sounds.

“The narrow canals and low bridges are not accessible from the road, and the posts have to be driven deep if they are to get a purchase on the peaty soil,” RTV Oost says, adding that the repairmen have to work with cranes mounted on floating pontoons.

This means the canals will be closed to locals and visitors alike for four hours early each morning until the end of May, by which time the 45 bridges in question should be fixed.

The council has put diversions in place for essential journeys, and has managed to repair two of the bridges so far.

(Source: BBC)

Good ‘til the last drop? \$75 cups of coffee sell out in California

If you thought your \$5 morning latte was expensive, think again.

Southern California-based Klatch Coffee Roasters has been selling a \$75 cup of coffee, and all sold out.

The company offered a tasting experience at its San Francisco location on May 11 and gave people the option to have some of the coffee shipped to them. According to Klatch’s website, the beans are all sold out.

■ Why is it so expensive?

From dying your hair to fixing furniture scratches, the humble coffee bean (and drink) has some surprisingly practical alternative uses. Click through for a selection of them.

The coffee shop is roasting the Elida Geisha 803 coffee beans from Panama. They were sold at \$803 per pound, the highest price paid for the beans at the Best of Panama green auction. The auction is referred to as the “Oscars for coffee.”

Only 100 pounds of the beans were available for purchase, and Klatch snatched up 10 of them, becoming the only coffee shop in the United States to have it. The beans were divided among their several Southern California locations and one shop in San Francisco. According to ABC7 News, a local Bay Area news station, the 10 pounds of beans comes out to about 80 cups of the Elida Geisha coffee.

“It’s a unique coffee that comes from Panama. It’s by far better than any of the coffee you hear about that comes from animals,” Bo Thiara, co-owner of the Bay Area Klatch, told ABC 7.

The Elida Geisha 803 is a type of Kopi Luwak coffee which is made from partially digested coffee beans. The beans are eaten by civets, a cat-like animal, and then pooped out.

(Source: USA Today)



ROUND THE GLOBE

City of Bath

The city of Bath in South West England was founded in the 1st century CE by the Romans who used the natural hot springs as a thermal spa. It became an important center for the wool industry in the Middle Ages but in the 18th century under the reigns of George I, II and III it developed into an elegant spa city, famed in literature and art.



The City of Bath is of Outstanding Universal Value for the following cultural attributes: The Roman remains, especially the Temple of Sulis Minerva and the baths complex (based around the hot springs at the heart of the Roman town of Aquae Sulis, which have remained at the heart of the City’s development ever since) are amongst the most famous and important Roman remains north of the Alps, and marked the beginning of Bath’s history as a spa town.

The Georgian city reflects the ambitions of John Wood Senior (1704-1754), Ralph Allen (1693-1764) and Richard “Beau” Nash (1674-1761) to make Bath into one of the most beautiful cities in Europe, with architecture and landscape combined harmoniously for the enjoyment of the spa town’s cure takers.

The Neo-classical style of the public buildings (such as the Assembly Rooms and the Pump Room) harmonises with the grandiose proportions of the monumental ensembles (such as Queen Square, Circus and Royal Crescent) and collectively reflects the ambitions, particularly social, of the spa city in the 18th century.

(Source: UNESCO)

Safari tourists harm elephants’ health and make them violent, researchers find

Tourists on safari are damaging elephants’ health, scaring them, stressing them out and making them more violent towards people and each other, new research says.

Herds retreat from where they are resting or feeding when groups of tourists turn up in jeeps and take photographs.

And elephants are more likely to be aggressive to other group members when large numbers of people are nearby, the 15-month study in South Africa found.

Lead author Isabelle Szott, of Liverpool John Moores University, said aggression in elephants rose in parallel with tourist pressure, with males more prone than females.

“Tourists who wish to observe animals in their natural habitat should be aware of their potential negative effects on animal welfare.

“Research should investigate best practice standards to minimize such negative effects,” Ms Szott said.

Observing elephants in the wild has become increasingly popular with holidaymakers as awareness has started to grow of the cruelty of riding the animals.

Captive elephants trained with hooks to give rides or perform tricks often develop post-traumatic stress.

Tourism chiefs say the income from the safari industry protects elephants and their habitats.



Last year a German tourist was trampled to death by an elephant as she tried to photograph it in Zimbabwe.

The woman was in a group of tourists who encountered a herd in Mana Pools National Park.

In 2017, a trained elephant was shot dead after fatally trampling a tour guide in

Zimbabwean tourist resort Victoria Falls.

Another local man was killed in a separate incident after trying to drive elephants into the open to take pictures.

A trend for taking selfies with wild elephants in the eastern Indian state of Orissa has also led to a series of fatal attacks. Officials believe such incidents are on the rise.

Other people have suffered serious injuries while taking selfies with elephants.

Earlier studies have found wildlife tourism causes fear, alertness, aggression, vigilance and stress behavior in animals including rhinos.

Ms Szott, whose research was published in the Journal of Zoology, said elephants at waterholes could experience frustration and stress, as well as being targeted by other herd members, increasing the risk of aggression towards people in vehicles.

“We suggest a consistent minimum distance from the nearest individual, especially upon first approach, should be introduced to guidelines for wildlife viewing to alleviate the potential for conflict,” she said.

Audrey Delsink, head of wildlife for Humane Society International/Africa, told The Independent: “Stress can be caused to animals if the guide or tourists approach too close to the elephants, coming between females and calves or cutting off exit routes, and it’s that sort of irresponsible behavior on the part of people that encourages negative responses in elephants.

“Wildlife tourism should not in itself cause an issue if conducted according to strict codes of conduct regulating how elephants should be viewed, such as safe-distance observation.”

(Source: The Independent)

Modern humans split from Neanderthals far earlier than thought: study

Scientists seeking to unlock the mysteries of human evolution have in recent years relied on increasingly sophisticated DNA techniques that provide “molecular clocks” to date the remains of our ancient ancestors.

But a new analysis that instead examines fossil teeth provides an alternative approach -- and one which yields a significantly earlier date for the divergence between modern humans and Neanderthals.

The study by Aida Gomez-Robles from University College London proposes that the two species’ last common ancestor may have lived 800,000 years ago, entering a debate that is hotly contested among anthropologists.

The new timeline is between 200,000 to 400,000 years earlier than current estimates, and if correct would rule out Homo heidelbergensis, another extinct human species, as the last common ancestor between Homo sapiens and our nearest relatives the Neanderthals, as some scientists presently posit.

According to Gomez-Robles, whose paper was published in Science Advances on Wednesday, recent research on hominin teeth has shown that while size varied greatly across various human species, the shape of teeth was more homogeneous and evolved at stable rates across the board.

She examined the molars and pre-molars of around 30 fossils thought to be early Neanderthals from the Sima de los Huesos cave site in Spain as well as of seven other extinct hominin species in order to determine how much they changed over time.

A 2014 study using luminescence techniques and palaeomagnetism was said to have reliably dated the cave site, in Spain’s Atapuerca Mountains, to 430,000 years ago, which already hinted that sapiens and Neanderthals went their separate ways before this time.

Using computer modeling, she found that early Sapiens and Neanderthals would have had to have diverged 800,000 years ago for the Sima teeth to have



had time to achieve their particular features, barring strong environmental factors that caused the species to evolve at a quicker rate.

“The major implication is Homo heidelbergensis cannot be the last common ancestor between modern humans and Neanderthals,” she told AFP.

■ No clean split

The findings may not put an end to the longstanding debate, not least because of its variance with some of the DNA-based dating, which also relies on assumptions about how quickly genetics change over time.

Gomez-Robles said that while no method was perfect, studying anatomical variation “gives us a more accurate picture” partly because it is still not possible to extract DNA from most ancient fossils.

Moreover, differing timelines could point to growing body of evidence that there are no clean splits between species.

“When we are talking about the divergence between Neanderthals and modern humans, or between any two species, that is not something that happens at one specific moment of time,” she told AFP.

“And something that we know today as well is that,

you know, there was a hybridization between Neanderthals and modern humans” she continued. “So this is also adding noise to all these studies.”

■ Praise and pushback

Gomez-Robles’ work was praised by Mirjana Roksandic, a biological anthropologist at the University of Winnipeg who recently co-authored her own paper which described H. heidelbergensis as non-Neanderthal.

“She is pinpointing a time when Neanderthals must have moved their own way and that is a very, very significant result,” said Roksandic.

“Teeth are born fossils, they carry so much information. They’re just absolutely brilliant that way,” she added.

The new methodology was also described as “useful” by Harvard anthropologist Bridget Alex, who nevertheless added that it raised the tension between genetic change against physical and physiological changes in evolution, which may not occur at the same rate.

But the study was criticized by Susan Cachel, a professor in human evolution at Rutgers University, who asked: “If the ancestors of anatomically modern humans and Neanderthals do not come from the taxon Homo heidelbergensis, then where do they come from? Some unknown, shadowy ancestor?”

Cachel added that “there is an astonishing amount of dental variation in living humans,” which she said undercut one of the key assumptions used by Gomez-Robles’ statistical model, pointing to the example of how some Native Americans have a distosagittal ridge, known as the “Uto-Aztec premolar.”

This trait “is globally very rare and geographically restricted, must have appeared within the last 15-20,000 years -- since the divergence between Native Americans and their ancestral population,” she said.

“I therefore question the idea that rates of dental evolution are invariably slow.”

(Source: AFP)

How to protect yourself from air pollution while traveling

By Hahna Yoon

Poor air quality is a growing problem for travelers headed abroad. Here’s how to read up before you go, and protect yourself once you’re there.

When Yondje Choi was told she would need a face mask for an upcoming trip to South Korea, Ms. Choi, a 31-year-old New Yorker, was shocked.

“I knew air pollution is a major problem in Beijing, but I didn’t know it was this bad here,” she said last month in Seoul.

While China takes a bulk of the heat when it comes to unhealthy levels of air quality, air pollution is a major issue throughout Asia and beyond, even to Europe and North America. Without research and self-care, even short-term visitors may feel the effects. Here are some precautions you can take to help you breathe easier.

■ Look up the air quality before you go

You can find a given city’s Air Quality Index, or A.Q.I., on air-monitoring websites like aqicn.org. This index indicates how polluted or dirty the air is (typically measuring particulate matter in the air) and explains the possible health implications of that level. While A.Q.I. levels are often referenced to in the United States during allergy season or at times of dust storms or wildfires, the index is commonplace throughout Asia. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has a complete explanation of what makes “good” or “bad” air quality on its website.

When it comes to travel, researching air-quality websites can help inform where you want to go and when you want to be there. Heavily polluted cities have bad A.Q.I. measures all year, but some destinations have only a few months of



daily, unhealthy air pollution. East Asian countries, for instance, are affected by Asian Dust (yellow dust particles carried on the wind from the Gobi Desert) in the spring, and many savvy travelers opt for visiting during the fall instead.

■ Learn face mask basics

A proper air-filtering face mask can

be your best friend when air quality is low. Although you can find disposable face masks at pharmacies in most cities, the type of masks recommended by medical professionals are rarely found in drugstores or department stores. You’re better off ordering quality ones online in advance of your trip instead of scrambling to find them in a new city.

Not sure which kind to get? Based on her research on the effectiveness of face masks in Beijing, Dr. Miranda Loh at the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh recommends looking for masks rated to at least N95 (meaning the mask removes 95 percent of all particles in the air that are at least 0.3 microns in diameter or larger) or FFP3 (meaning the mask may only leak a maximum of 5 percent or air and it must filter 99 percent of all particles measuring up to 0.6 microns), both standards that indicate a high ability to filter out fine dust.

Of the masks she studied, Dr. Loh said she found 3M’s Aura Disposable Respirator 9322+ mask most effective at consistently reducing exposure to their study volunteers. In addition to buying a proper mask, she recommends limiting a mask’s use and wearing the mask strictly as its package instructs.

When you should wear your mask depends on your age and health, and there’s no strict guideline that everyone everywhere agrees on. In China, for instance, the government suggests wearing a mask when the A.Q.I. is over 200, but many people choose to wear one when the A.Q.I. is closer to 100 or 150. Your best bet is to look at the A.Q.I. on a given day, review the air quality scale, and judge for yourself. People with respiratory issues, allergies or asthma should be especially careful.

■ Love the skin you’re in

After a day of sightseeing, protecting your skin and your lungs from air pollution and particulates that may have settled in your clothes, on your skin or in your hair, is simple: take a shower as soon as you can, apply sunscreen and moisturizer, and repeat every time you spend a prolonged period outdoors.

Dr. Steven Wang, director of Dermatology at the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of Basking Ridge, has studied the effects of ambient air pollution on skin. His top tips include applying sunscreen in the morning; using gentle, liquid cleansers; and generally making sure to take care of your skin when you travel.

■ Know when to just stay inside

Refraining from outdoor activities on heavily-polluted days is the most common piece of advice when it comes to avoiding the effects of air pollution from medical experts, including those at the American Lung Association. Plan activities like museum visits, souvenir shopping trips, and other mostly-indoor activities for days when the air quality is really bad. Or, just keep a few of those activities in your pocket in case everything seems good one day, but the air quality takes a turn on the next.

Fortunately for those looking for a reprieve from air pollution, a growing number of accommodations and activities are now making clean air a main feature. Not only have several hotel chains have added air purifiers to their list of amenities, but smog-free cinemas, oxygen bars and clean air cafes have become en vogue in cities like Seoul, Bangkok and Beijing. If you’ve already been to the museum, maybe it’s time to take in a film.

(Source: The New York Times)

‘Transportation, tourism and energy are important for making Isfahan a smart city’

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — Smart transportation, tourism, water resources and energy are all important for making Isfahan a smart city, the secretary of smart city council of Isfahan Municipality announced, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Mehdi Behroozi made the remarks during a meeting held in Tehran on the necessity of smart city in today world.

Isfahan enjoys e-city and e-government services, he said, adding that smart transportation systems, smart traffic lights, smart traffic counter and smart air quality monitoring system have already been established in Isfahan.

However the smart city would be possible through automatic connection between these elements, he explained.

So far some applications have provided the information for empty parking spaces for the citizens, he said.

Behroozi also explained about smart irrigation system, which is already operating in the city, he added.

Cashless taxi services, which is possible through QR Code, is another service in the city of Isfahan, he explained.

The council plans to use smart methods and up-to-date applications for street parking spaces, he added.

Smart governance, smart citizen, smart ecosystem, smart economy, smart transport and smart energy are the categories of smart city worldwide, he said.

The data received by electronic devices should be processed in order to achieve



the smart city goals, he added.

The good data process is a great help for smart city, he explained.

Unfortunately the laws belong to the time before digitalization and there is no facility for innovation development, he lamented.

Safety is one of the most important factors in smart cities, which should be considered before the start, he said.

Education of human resource is very important in smart city, which should be considered by the government, he said.

■ Strategic management, an important factor in smart cities

The smart city faces executive and operational challenges and the strategic management is one of the most important challenges in smart cities, an expert with cyberspace strategic management said.

Ehsan Shahir said that different groups of people including children, clergies, teachers and elderly should be considered as one of the most important smart city project.

Privacy, content, software and hardware as well as IT-based infrastructures and in-

formation are important for safety factors in smart city, he said.

■ Smart cities - statistics & facts

According to statista, smart cities, also commonly known as cyberville, digital cities, intelligent cities, and wired cities, are urban areas that collect electronic data from citizens, devices, and assets to manage available resources more efficiently.

A wide range of information and communications technology (ICT) applications are executed to enhance, reduce costs and resource use, as well as increase the communication between government and citizens. Ideally, these applications can enhance knowledge and innovations, promote working environments, and connect technology and society. It also strives to embed a digital connection between government services and citizens to positively impact local communities.

There are dozens of ways to define a smart city based on the types of technology implemented and its goals.

For example, developments of ubiquitous cities (U-Cities) in South Korea has been notable; U-Cities aim to connect citizens to any service through any smart device.

Knowledge cities focus on the innovation of the knowledge economy and subsequently aim to increase its skilled workforce. A digital city is defined as a region that allows for increased interconnection and information sharing. Despite a wide range in the purposes behind smart cities, they generally promote the efficient use of physical infrastructure and act as a collaborative effort between locals and government to improve the city.

Iranian company manufactures nano air filter for cars

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — An Iranian knowledge-based company has manufactured nano air filter for vehicles, which can decrease air pollution by 20 percent, ISNA reported on Friday.

The filter, which is made from polyacrylonitrile (PAN) nanofibers, also has impact on vehicle fuel economy from 5 to 15 percent.

If 25 percent of vehicles use this nano air filter, Iran can save 100 million liters of fuel annually, the director of the company Shahpour Pirouzi said.

In this way, the country can save 100 thousand trillion rials (about \$2 billion) in facing air pollution, he explained.

Most of domestic cars including Pride, Samand, different types of Peugeots, Renault Logan L90 and Citroën Xantia can use the filter, he added.

Nanofibers, with smaller thickness and higher surface area than regular fibers, have enormous applications in filtration. Electrospinning (also called electrostatic fiber spinning) has been one of the promising processes to produce continuous nano-scale fibers from both synthetic and natural polymers.



■ Air quality status in Tehran

Unlike the inefficiency of measures taken so far by Tehran Municipality to control the growing air pollution in the metropolis, data from Tehran Air Quality Control Company (TAQCC) shows during the past months, Tehran residents had some relief with better air quality compared to the previous year.

Charts published on TAQCC website show that in Feb-

ruary, for instance, the capital breathed less polluted air.

Bright blue skies were seen for approximately one-fourth of the studied period, as the air quality index was in 'good' condition for seven days.

The index categorizes conditions according to a measure of polluting matters into good (0-50), moderate (51-100), unhealthy for sensitive groups (101-150), unhealthy (151-200), very unhealthy (201-300) and hazardous (301-500). Tehran saw 21 days of 'moderate' air quality, with the index swinging between 51 and 100.

TAQCC data proved that in February, sensitive groups in the capital breathed only 3 days of 'unhealthy' air as the index stood between 101 and 150.

Pollutants measured to determine air quality include carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, ground-level ozone and particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10). AQI figures are calculated as per the concentration of pollutants.

Analyses reveal that the pollutant responsible for the three moderate days recorded in the studied period was PM2.5 (atmospheric particulate matters that have a diameter of smaller than 2.5 micrometers).

First ICT co-working space established in Tehran

HEALTH **TEHRAN** — The first Iranian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) co-working space was established in Tehran.

Located at the venue of Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology, it is sponsored by the private sector.

Co-working is defined as a self-directed, collaborative, flexible and voluntary work style that is based on mutual trust and the sharing of common core values between its participants.

The co-working space hosts companies, startups and freelancers active in different fields of ICT.

The ICT co-working space aims to establish network between members of ICT ecosystem, improve marketing through platform management of the working space.

It also aims to hold events and academic courses to fill the gaps between universities and industries.

According to coworkingresources.org, co-working is a growing trend for startups as well as for people who work from home. With co-working spaces, you pay for a membership, either for a choice of seating options every day or a dedicated desk. There are even offices available at many co-working companies.

Iranian Research Institute for Information Science and Technology (IranDoc) is a national institute affiliated to the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), Iran. It has five main missions: research, scientific and technical information management, education, scientific cooperation, and supporting science and technology policy-making.

Having 50 years of experience, IranDoc now exploits more than 100 experts, nine research groups in three departments, and three research laboratories. It has developed one of the biggest Persian scientific



and technical databases in Iran with more than one million records.

These are the top skill sets for a successful blockchain team

KPMG has defined what it sees as the most important skills needed for a top-notch blockchain team – and knowledge of blockchain isn't necessarily the most important one.

As undergraduates emerge from schools with software development or business skills, companies exploring blockchain use are seeking job candidates with four specific skill sets, according to a new report from consultancy KPMG.

Those skills are needed more with each passing month; KPMG expects an increase in the number of companies exploring blockchain this year for everything from identifying new business models to piloting projects and ultimately, progressing to scalable solutions. KPMG said, not surprisingly, that it's seeking graduates with a solid grasp of blockchain at a high level – those who understand distributed ledgers, peer-to-peer topologies and consensus mechanisms; all are key for a technologist hoping to land a high-paying blockchain developer job.

But even more critical is an understanding of the business landscape and how to apply the still-emerging technology to a specific problem.

■ The nexus of tech and business acumen

"The key thing we do at KPMG is balance an understanding of how this technology

works without being a blockchain hammer looking for a nail," said Tegan Keele, KPMG's U.S. blockchain program lead. "You have to know how to apply it and that really only comes if you have an understanding of business processes."

Secondly, members of a blockchain team should understand the difference between a variety of technologies, including the cloud, protocols, ERPs and networks, and know when to use different mechanisms and platforms.

"This will help ensure they can understand how blockchain interacts within an existing technology ecosystem, and how that ecosystem will impact the design of the blockchain solution," KPMG said. "And for those who are planning to work on the development side of blockchain, some knowledge of coding (JavaScript, HTML, solidity, etc.) is helpful...."

That means the company looks for blockchain developers with business acumen, such as a knowledge of supply chain or procurement systems or finance processes – skills that are already taught in undergraduate programs.

KPMG also looks for a job candidate's technical literacy, or the ability to understand data generated on a blockchain platform and how to use it in a business context.

One of the key attributes of blockchain

is its ability to span an organization and its business partners, essentially connecting multiple, disparate entities through a single, transparent electronic ledger.

"But, then you have multiple people within each participating entity looking at the blockchain and they're all going to want to see slightly different things," Keele said. "So understanding how to derive those insights out of the information on a blockchain is key."

■ **A hacker's ability to problem solve** Those entering the blockchain development/engineering field should have the mentality of a hacker - or the ability to problem solve collaboratively in a workshop setting when a client presents a business problem.

They need to be able to think through the business objectives, implications and value "for each of the participants and then [define] the architecture and overall solution flow," KPMG said. "It is this collaborative approach that leads to a successful application of blockchain."

Given the lack of coursework around blockchain and its relatively new existence in the enterprise, a team must be open to exploring and experimenting by "hacking the problem" from a business and IT perspective, according to KPMG.

"I'd say at KPMG we've been very successful at taking [employee] skills in-house and

upselling them to deliver blockchain skills," Keele said. "Until universities start printing blockchain degrees, that will be the pattern that will continue."

The list of U.S. universities now offering courses on blockchain continues to grow and includes such prestigious institutions as MIT, Princeton, UC Berkeley and Stanford University.

The top blockchain jobs, according to a report last year by BusinessStudent.com, are interns, project managers, developers, engineers, quality engineers, legal consultants or attorneys and web designers.

While most techies who add blockchain to their skillset are versed in programming languages such as Java or Python, it's by no means a prerequisite for learning the technology.

Like any emerging technology, having the right talent is paramount to driving results, KPMG's report said.

"Blockchain projects will not succeed or scale without a multifaceted team that goes beyond technologists," KPMG wrote. "We expect more universities to integrate blockchain into future coursework, which will help prepare both end users as well as those who will be responsible for building, deploying and managing blockchain."

(Source: computerworld.com)

Over 7,200 villages to be linked with National Information Network

1 → Up to now, 80 percent of rural area have ICT coverage, the ICT Ministry announced.

The first phase of e-government services project in Iran officially came on stream under the title of 'Mobile Government' in mid-May 2018.

The project aims to facilitate some government services, reduce unnecessary expenses and ease traffic jam, which is the main cause of air pollution in big cities.

It is based on the National Information Network, an ongoing project to develop a secure and stable infrastructure network in the country.



According to a report released by the Measuring Information Society of Iran at the Information Technology Organization in January, 64 percent of Iranians above six years are internet users.

A survey was conducted at urban and rural areas during winter season of the Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended March 20, 2018) by the Statistical Center of Iran.

According to the survey, the internet user is defined as someone who has used internet during the past three months and by this definition 46,315,545 people are internet users in Iran.

According to the report, 72.8 percent of Iranian families have access to the internet, which means that 17,936,000 families benefit from internet nationwide.

A total of 17,216,000 families have access to computer, which is 69.7 percent of the population.

Appropriate ecosystem can improve innovation: VP

TECHNOLOGY **TEHRAN** — The innovation should be improved in an appropriate ecosystem and the education is not enough, the vice president for science and technology said, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Sourena Sattari said that the development is possible with soft technology, which can turn into innovative companies with planning.

Innovation and creation can create value added for the young generation, which is weakened by the oil economy, he lamented.

Development cannot be imported from other countries but it is an inner power, which is strengthened by empowering entrepreneurship in a society, he explained.

The new generation of entrepreneurs improve without oil money and they can continue their way with appropriate laws and omission of bureaucratic procedures, he added.

Video game addiction could be made an official disease

Games developers say they are listening to and acting on rising concerns about the disorder as more people are being affected.

Video game addiction could be made an official disease after it was officially recognised and classified by the World Health Organization (WHO).

The disorder has been suggested by some medics as a distinct behavioral addiction characterized by excessive or compulsive use of computer games or video games that affects an individual's daily life.

Last June, WHO included gaming disorder within the 11th revision of its international classification of diseases and next week it will vote on whether to make it an official disease.

Gaming impacted every aspect of James Good's life including his mental and physical health.

Microsoft said it is giving more power to parents to control how much time their children can spend gaming.

Microsoft's head of gaming Dave McCarthy told Sky News: "We put a lot of controls in place that parents can leverage to manage things like screen time and game usage."

"And we also think as an industry there is more we can and should do around research and collaboration."

Other concerns among parents of children who play video games also include safety and violence, aggression and misbehavior.

Microsoft's Dave McCarthy said the company is giving more power to parents

WHO has said that only a small number of people are actually affected by gaming disorder.

However the consequences can be catastrophic for those suffering from gaming addiction.

Former gaming addict James Good became addicted to video games during his teenage years and his obsession led to depression and extreme mood swings, affecting every part of his life.

He told Sky News: "Most of the time I would tell my friends I couldn't go out because I had work to do - but I would just stay at home and play video games until three in the morning. "Then I would do my coursework, hand it in at 9am and then go back to bed".

Since kicking his addiction nine months ago, Mr. Good has developed new interests and joined a community called Game Quitters, where he helps other addicts and advises worried parents.

It has been unclear how much gaming disorder is caused by the gaming activity itself, or whether it could be an effect of other disorders.

In 2008 researchers at the University of Rochester investigated what motivates gamers to continue playing video games, with lead investigator Richard Ryan claiming individuals play for more reasons than fun alone.

He said that many video games satisfy basic psychological needs, and players continue playing because of rewards, freedom and connection to other players.

(Source: news.sky.com)

Iran supports breadwinner women granting solar power plants

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Iran plans to facilitate income generation for breadwinner women providing them with small-scale solar power plants, Vice President for Women’s and Family Affairs, Masoumeh Ebtekar, said. Ebtekar made the remarks during a meeting with the Dutch ambassador to Iran, Jacques Werner, on Wednesday, Mehr news agency reported.

The two officials discussed issues in the field of entrepreneur women, supporting women-headed families, and facilitating income generation for those who support their family solely.

“We are planning on launching campaigns to support entrepreneur women as well as supporting projects for breadwinner women employment,” she highlighted.

Ebtekar went on to say that “we decided to provide a number of small scale solar power plants across the country to be used by female headed households, as an alternative for earning monthly income through selling the generated power to the country’s grid.”

Werner further lauded the country’s plan for supporting the breadwinner women, and expressed readiness to exchange information and experiences in the field of energy generation and water resources management.

According to statistics released in 2017, there are around 2.5 million breadwinner women in the country, including 180,000 families, making up 500,000 people.

About 71 percent of breadwinner women have taken the responsibility of their families due to loss of their husbands.

Some 11 percent of breadwinning women are divorced, 10 percent are disabled or handicapped or have drug-addicted husbands, and about 5 percent of them are unmarried girls who are taking caring of their parents or their whole families.

Solar-powered photovoltaic panels convert the sun’s rays into electricity by exciting electrons in silicon cells using the photons of light from the sun, which is the cleanest, most reliable form of renewable energy, and can be used in several forms to help generate electricity along with income.

Charity foundation to launch 200 health care centers in deprived areas

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Barekat Charity Foundation will launch 200 health care centers in underprivileged areas across the country, an official with the foundation has said.

The medical units will offer comprehensive health care, medical, rehabilitation and treatment services as well as emergency services, YJC quoted Ali Vaezinejad as saying on Saturday.

The health care centers will be launched in 16 provinces across the country, costing 683 billion rials (nearly \$16 million), he added.

He went on to say that some 147 of 200 centers have so far been operational, and the rest will be soon be up and running.

In order to ensure medical services in deprived areas, a memorandum of understanding was inked with the Ministry of Health to construct some 10 hospitals, he stated.

To do that, a total budget of 1.1 billion rials (nearly \$28 million) has been allocated, he said, adding that so far, 8 hospitals have been fully constructed and 2 others are being completed.

Barekat Charity Foundation, affiliated to Headquarters for Executing the Order of the Imam also known as Setad-e Ejraiy-e Farman-e Hazrat-e Imam, has been established on December 11, 2007, in order to act as an organization to uproot deprivation, to realize economic and social empowerment and to carry out public affairs.

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Bomb attacks in Moscow

(September 16, 1999)

The most recent bomb blast in Moscow targeted an apartment block where the death toll rose to 118. BBC Russian Affairs Specialists Paul Anderson and Malcolm Haslett reported. More than a thousand rescue workers have been searching the blast site for sign of survivors but hopes of reaching anyone alive have **all but** disappeared. As they worked, a **huge** police operation **swung into action** to find three men named as key suspects. Security at nuclear power plants, airports and other **potential targets** throughout Russia has been **stepped up**. Troops and police have been drafted into the capital and have been searching buildings for explosives. They reported finding and **defusing** one bomb. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack. Most people in Moscow live in **just such a block** as the two destroyed in the past week, in Guryanova Street and now on the busy Kashirskoye Boulevard on the city’s south side. In both cases the **multi-storeyed buildings** collapsed in a **heap of rubble**. The people asleep inside had little chance of escape, whether they were on the top storeys or lower down. Many of Moscow’s apartment blocks were built rapidly from pre-fabricated panels in the **post-war years**, to house the dramatic expansion of the population which now **stands at** over ten million. These blocks have always been **vulnerable** to fire and gas explosions, like the one last year which killed six people.

Words

all but: very nearly or almost

huge: very large

swung into action: began

potential targets: possible targets - places that may be aimed at

stepped up: increased

defusing: taking a fuse out of a bomb so that it cannot explode.

A fuse delays the explosion of a bomb

just such a block: a block of flats similar to the one which has been destroyed

multi-storeyed buildings: buildings constructed on a number of levels or storeys (floors)

a heap of rubble: a pile of broken glass, metal and cement

post-war years: in this case, the years following the Second World War

stands at: at present the population is over ten million but this number may change

vulnerable: if a building is vulnerable, then it is not well protected against explosions - from fire, gas or bombs

(Source: BBC)

Dam constriction on Anzali wetland; threats and advantages

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — With the construction project of Lasak dam on Anzali wetland getting underway many are now voicing concerns or counting advantages of building the dam on the precious ecosystem.

Following the construction of a dam in Gilan province, Anzali wetland may bear dire consequences, Masoud Baqerzadeh Karimi, the director general of aquatic ecosystems at the Department of Environment (DOE) has said.

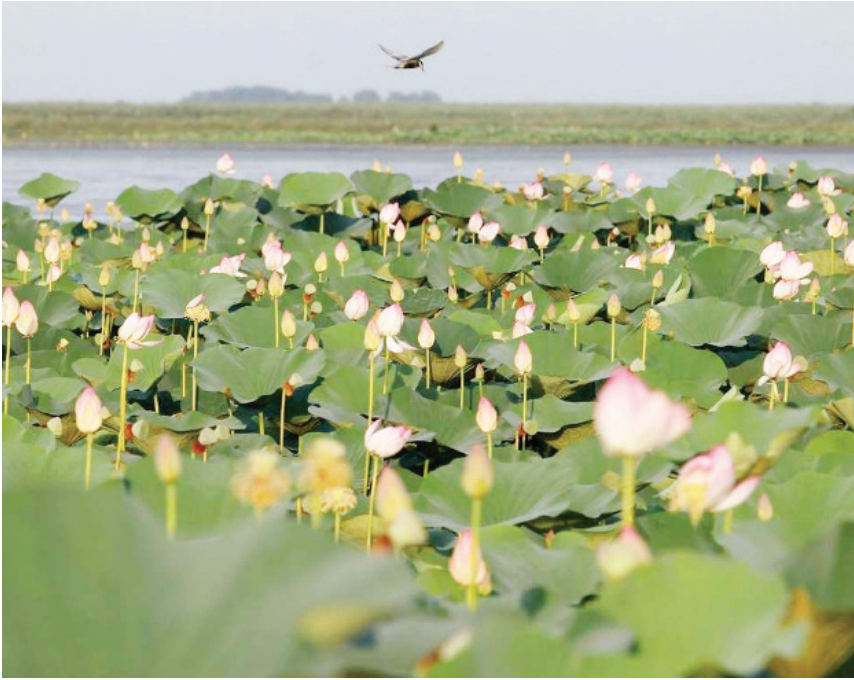
Covering more than 19,000 hectares, the wetland is located near the northern port city of Bandar Anzali, neighboring the Caspian Sea. The wetland was designated as a Ramsar site on June 23, 1975. It is fed by several rivers and separated from the Caspian Sea by a dune system. The lagoon is home to submerged and floating vegetation and also extensive reed beds. It bears international importance in terms of breeding, staging and wintering water birds.

Lasak dam prevents the entry of spring floods into the wetland, which results in accumulation of sediment, and finally water level reduction, he lamented.

The wetland is already suffering huge sediment loads accumulated on its bed which causes the wetland to loose part of its retaining capacity, he stated, adding, so, the wetland is not able to retain water and the water constantly enters the sea.

In such condition, dam construction only compounds the situation, when the wetland already must be revived reducing sediment loads and expanding its capacity, he further said.

He went on to explain that obviously, the dam acts like a barrier preventing spring floods into the wetland, which can move the sediments and contaminants to enter the sea; although pushing the pollution to the sea is not a good idea, it prevents the accumulation and concentration of contaminants in the wetland.



Lasak dam prevents the entry of spring floods into the wetland, which results in accumulation of sediment, and finally water level reduction

Dam construction is in contrast with wetland conservation, restoration means increasing the wetland’s reservoir volume, on the other hand, dam prevents the water to enter the wetland, so, if the wetland capacity expand, there will be no water to fill it, he also explained.

At least an important point must be considered in damming, which is granting the wetland’s water right, he highlighted, adding so, environmental assessment prior to construction is a must.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he stated that economic activities, such as tourism, fishing and sailing, also depend on the depth of the wetland, adding, some species of migratory birds wintering in the Anzali wetland choose its deepest areas as habitats for food supplies, therefore, it will greatly affect the area’s biodiversity.

Deputy environment chief Masoud Tajrishi also said that Lasak dam will surely bring environmental consequences, but it has a 4 percent effect on the inflow of

Anzali wetland.

Referring to the dam as a source of fresh water supply, he said that unfortunately, due to excessive use of fertilizers and chemical pesticides, groundwater resources of the provinces of Gilan and Mazandaran are polluted and the dam’s water must not be used for drinking purposes.

This is while, Vahid Khorrami, Gilan’s regional water company director, said that the dam has a positive effect on the reduction of Anzali wetland’s sediments.

One of the objectives of constructing the Lasak dam is reducing the sediments, which are continuously entering the wetland even when there is no dam near it, he said, adding, so the dam will help the wetland to get rid of the sediment loads.

Over 2.3 billion cubic meters of water enter Anzali wetland, and the Lasak dam retain only 45 million cubic meters of water, of which, 33 million cubic meters will be released as the water right of the wetland, he explained.

He went on to conclude that the flood will be restricted by the dam, therefore, it will help reduce the accumulation of sediments in the wetland.

In early January Mehdi Abtahi director of Isfahan Science and Technology Town said that amid all the contaminations increasing in the wetland for a long period of time, minerals play a major role in causing severe threats to the regions biodiversity, thus the wetland undergone numerous environmental problems.

A scheme on restoration of the endangered Anzali wetland by removing contaminants using domestic bioremediation nano-technology will be implemented, which is earmarked a total budget of 9 trillion rials (nearly \$215 million), he added.

The scheme was proposed by researchers at Isfahan Science and Technology Town and approved by the DOE.

Iranian DOE succeeded in monitoring dioxin, furan emissions

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Dioxin and furan, highly toxic persistent organic pollutants, have been sampled for the first time in an attempt by experts, head of environmental pollutants monitoring office at the Department of Environment (DOE) said.

Polychlorinated dibenzo-p-dioxins (PCDD) and dibenzofurans (PCDFs) are highly toxic persistent organic pollutants (POPs), which can cause various health outcomes, such as cancer. They are found throughout the world in the environment and accumulate in the food chain, mainly in the fatty tissue of animals.

Sampling of dioxins and furans is an automatic system for continuous monitoring of emissions from industrial processes which require official approval in compliance with environmental regulations.

“Sampling was carried out in a waste disposal site in Markazi province during three days with DOE representatives in attendance,” Mehr quoted Shina Ansari as saying on Saturday.

“The process of measuring and sampling dioxin and furans emissions is complex and requires specific equipment,” she added.

Considering waste incinerators operations in the northern part of the country, measurements of dioxins and furans, emitted from the incinerators, are of particular importance, she said, adding that it has always been emphasized that high-tech waste incinerators [to avoid release of such hazardous



emissions] should be purchased, but waste segregation at source plays a more vital role in this regard.

Burning wet and dry waste can increase the concentration of air pollutants, therefore, even if incinerators are advanced, measuring dioxins and furans at the smoke released from the incinerators is undeniable, she highlighted.

She went on to state that measuring these pollutants using domestic lab and experts is a turning point in monitoring specific emissions.

“Monitoring specific air pollutants such as heavy metal, volatile organic compounds, including dioxins and furans, is one of the measures needed to be taken alongside monitoring

common air quality index in mega cities and industrial areas,” she concluded.

Effects of dioxins on human health

According to WHO, short-term exposure of humans to high levels of dioxins may result in skin lesions, such as chloracne and patchy darkening of the skin, and altered liver function. Long-term exposure is linked to impairment of the immune system, the developing nervous system, the endocrine system and reproductive functions. Chronic exposure of animals to dioxins has resulted in several types of cancer.

Due to the omnipresence of dioxins, all people have background exposure and a certain level of dioxins in the body, leading to the so-called body burden. Current normal background exposure is not expected to affect human health on average. However, due to the high toxic potential of this class of compounds, efforts need to be undertaken to reduce current background exposure.

How to control dioxin exposure?

Proper incineration of contaminated material is the best available method of preventing and controlling exposure to dioxins. The incineration process requires high temperatures, over 850°C. For the destruction of large amounts of contaminated material, even higher temperatures - 1000°C or more - are required.

Prevention or reduction of human exposure is best done via source-directed measures, i.e. strict control of industrial processes to reduce formation of dioxins as much as possible.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

97% of Iran affected by long-term drought: expert

Based on the dada collected over the past decade approximately 97 percent of the country is affected by long-term drought, director of the national drought warning and monitoring center, Sadeq Ziaeian, has said.

Some 12.7 percent of the country is hit by extremely severe drought, 53.6 percent of the country is affected by severe drought while 24.8 percent of the country is facing moderate drought and 5.9 percent of the country is withstanding mild drought, ISNA news agency quoted Ziaeian as saying on Wednesday.

He went on to say that extremely severe long-term drought has had negative effects on 14.2 percent of the country’s total population, severe long-term drought has hit 47 percent of the country’s population, 30.7 percent of the country’s population is affected by moderate long-term drought and 5.1 percent of the population is stricken with mild drought.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“fore-”

■ **Meaning:** before, front

■ **For example:** Can dreams *foretell* the future?

PHRASAL VERB

Hack somebody off

■ **Meaning:** to annoy someone

■ **For example:** His attitude really hacks me off!

IDIOM

Bring something/nothing to the table

■ **Explanation:** if you participate in negotiations and bring nothing to the table, you have nothing of interest to offer the other side

■ **For example:** “We’ll never reach an agreement if we don’t all bring something to the table.”

۹۷ درصد مساحت ایران تحت تاثیر خشکسالی است

صادق ضیائیان رئیس مرکز ملی خشکسالی و مدیریت بحران سازمان هواشناسی اعلام کرد: بررسی داده‌های ۱۰ ساله خشکسالی بیانگر آن است که ۹۷ درصد مساحت ایران تحت تأثیر خشکسالی بلندمدت است. ضیائیان در گفت‌وگو با ایسنا گفت: از این مقدار ۵۳٫۶ درصد مساحت کشور با خشکسالی شدید، ۱۲٫۷ درصد با خشکسالی بسیار شدید، ۲۴٫۸ درصد مساحت با خشکسالی متوسط و ۵٫۹ درصد مساحت با خشکسالی خفیف مواجه هستند. وی ادامه داد: ۲ درصد جمعیت ایران با خشکسالی بسیار شدید بلندمدت است همچنین ۴۷ درصد جمعیت کشور با خشکسالی شدید، ۳۰٫۷ درصد جمعیت با خشکسالی متوسط و ۵٫۱ درصد جمعیت با خشکسالی خفیف دست و پنجه نرم می‌کنند.

Syria says its air defenses intercept several Israeli projectiles

1→ The Israeli regime launches air-strikes on the Syrian territory from time to time. Such aggressive moves are usually viewed as attempts to prop up terrorist groups suffering defeats at the hands of Syrian government forces.

On April 13, the Syrian army said that its air defenses intercepted some of the Israeli missiles fired at a Syrian military base near the city of Hama, while the remaining missiles hitting the target destroyed a number of buildings and wounded three Syrian troopers.

■ Syrian air defenses foil drones, rockets fired at key base

Meanwhile, Syria says its air defenses in the Hmeimim air base have thwarted projectiles and drones fired by terrorist groups.

Terrorist groups fired projectiles at Hmeimim, situated in Latakia's Jableh district, as well as the nearby Qardaha neighborhood, the Syrian



TV reported on Saturday. It also noted that the attack had left one

person dead and several others wounded. Syria's official SANA news agency con-

firmed that terrorists based in the provinces of Idlib and Latakia had fired rockets at Sharasher and Hweiz villages in Lattakia countryside, killing one civilian and injuring two others.

The terrorist attack, it added, also caused material damage to Syrian houses.

In recent weeks, there has been a surge in attacks from Idlib which is the last major terrorist stronghold.

Russia has been piling pressure on Turkey to start an operation against terrorist-held areas after Ankara's failure to get militants linked to al-Qaeda out of a buffer zone agreed between the two countries.

In September, a deal was struck with the assistance of Russia and Turkey to make Idlib a de-escalation zone. The area is now largely controlled by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham which was formerly known as Jubhat al-Nusra.

Russia has said it will refuse to consider terrorists "untouchable" and continue to target them.

Maduro says Norway talks sought 'peaceful agenda' with opposition

TEHRAN — Talks in Norway this week with representatives of Venezuela's government and the opposition sought to "build a peaceful agenda" for the crisis-stricken South American country, President Nicolas Maduro said.

Norway's foreign ministry, which has a tradition of conflict mediation, said earlier on Friday that the talks were in an "exploratory phase."

The representatives of each side arrived in the Nordic country this week, signaling a fresh approach to ending months of tensions that escalated after a failed uprising last month led by opposition leader Juan Guaido, who called on the military to oust Maduro, Reuters reported.

So far this year, dozens of people have been killed in opposition pro-

tests against Maduro's government. An economic downturn has driven more than 3 million Venezuelans to emigrate, fleeing hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine.

The ruling socialist party, which has long said it is open to dialogue, has endorsed the talks. But many sectors of the opposition remain skeptical, arguing that Maduro has in the past used dialogue as a stalling tactic to maintain his grip on power as living standards steadily declined in the oil-rich nation.

"Norway announces that it has had preliminary contacts with representatives of the main political actors of Venezuela, as part of an exploratory phase," the ministry said in a statement.

Massacres won't weaken Yemeni nation: Houthi leader

TEHRAN — The leader of Yemen's Ansarullah movement has condemned the recent Saudi-led airstrikes on residential areas in the Yemeni capital Sana'a, saying the attacks won't weaken the nation's determination.

"The enemy's persistent crimes will never weaken the will of the Yemeni nation; they are in fact steadfast in the resistance against the enemy's aggression," said Abdul-Malik Badreddin al-Houthi on Saturday.

At least seven civilians, including children, were killed in the Saudi air raids on Thursday. Four of those died were from one family. Dozens more were also wounded in the attacks.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs later said that five children had died as a result

of the airstrike.

Houthi said that killings served as yet another instance of Saudi crimes against the country, revealing the "true essence" of the enemy.

"The coalition proved its animosity towards the Muslim people of Yemen since the first days [of its campaign] and showed that the victims of the coalition's crimes are children, women and civilians which are bombed while asleep," he said.

According to Press TV, The Ansarullah leader further noted that "the crimes of the coalition have developed into a well-known issue in the world."

"Today, the transgressing coalition — with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at its forefront, along with all its backers — hosts the worst record in genocide in the world," he said.

Israeli disinformation campaign targeted Nigerian election

A U.S. think tank that analyzes misinformation online said Friday that an Israel-based influence campaign busted by Facebook had stumped for the winning candidate in the February 2019 Nigerian presidential elections.

A new report from the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab highlights sample posts removed from Facebook that appeared to praise incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari and smear his leading opponent, Atiku Abubakar.

Many of the pages and accounts were discovered to be linked to a Tel Aviv-based political consulting and lobbying firm named Archimedes. On its sparse website of African stock images, the company advertises its deliberate efforts to conduct disinformation campaigns, boasting that it takes "every advantage available in order to change reality according to our client's wishes" through "unlimited online accounts operation."

Facebook banned Archimedes from the platform Thursday for its "coordinated and deceptive behavior" and conducted a sweeping takedown of dozens of accounts and hundreds of pages primarily aimed at disrupting elections in African countries, with some scattered activity in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Overall, the misleading accounts had reached some 2.8 million

users, and the pages had engaged over 5,000 followers, according to Facebook's estimates.

One of the pages that Facebook cancelled appeared filled with viral misinformation attacking Abubakar, the former vice president of Nigeria. The page's banner image showed Abubakar as Darth Vader, the Star Wars villain, holding up a sign reading, "Make Nigeria Worse Again."

Another page with almost identical visuals, although significantly excluding the Darth Vader mask, purported to support Abubakar, with the slogan "Team Atiku For President." The report identified the page as a covert attempt to infiltrate Abubakar's audience of potential voters and manipulate their views, gradually spamming them with antithetical content and diverting them to the "Make Nigeria Worse" page.

The report also featured a page that explicitly lionized and boosted Buhari, with amateur videos eulogizing the accomplishments of his presidency as though he were not locked in a tight battle for re-election.

Yet another series of pages targeted the local Rivers state elections in Nigeria's turbulent south, which was marred by widespread violence. Several of the removed pages attempted to defame a candidate from Abubakar's People's Democratic Party and boost his



opponent. One page with artificially amplified audience engagement, called "Rivers Violence Watch," pumped out political propaganda while posing as a neutral monitor of election violence, using the page description to mask its efforts.

Most of the pages claimed to be run by local Nigerian users, but in fact were managed from Israel.

(Source: AP)

Austrian far-right leader quits over video sting as coalition teeters

TEHRAN— Austria's vice chancellor and longtime far-right leader, Heinz-Christian Strache, said on Saturday he was stepping down over "catastrophic" video footage of him that threatened to bring down the right-wing coalition government.

Freedom Party (FPO) leader Strache was shown in the footage of as-yet unknown origin meeting a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch in 2017, shortly before the election that brought him to power, Reuters reported.

In the footage published by German media on Friday evening, a week before European Parliament elections, he appears to offer to funnel contracts toward a company in exchange for political and financial support.

"It was dumb, it was irresponsible and

it was a mistake," Strache told a news conference, fighting back tears as he asked his wife and others to forgive him. He maintained, however, that he had done nothing illegal and that it was a "targeted political assassination".

"In the cold light of day, my remarks were catastrophic and exceedingly embarrassing," he said about the video, in which he also referred to party financing rules and how to work around them, but also insisted on having to act legally.

Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz is expected to make a statement later on Saturday as speculation swirled about whether the damage would be limited to Strache or if Kurz would call a snap election only a year and a half after the coalition between his conservatives and the FPO was formed.

N. Korea asks UN chief to address ship seizure by 'gangster' U.S.

TEHRAN— North Korea has asked United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to deal with the "illegal" seizure of one of its cargo ships by the United States, state media said on Saturday.

"This act of dispossession has clearly indicated that the United States is indeed a gangster country that does not care at all about international laws," the North Korean ambassador to the United Nations said in a letter sent to Guterres dated Friday, according to North Korea's KCNA news agency.

According to Reuters, Pyongyang's protest to the United Nations over the seizure comes amid mounting tensions since a second summit between North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump, aimed at bringing about the denuclearization of the North, broke

down in Hanoi in February.

The letter also called for "urgent measures" by Guterres and claimed that Washington infringed the North's sovereignty and violated UN charters.

With the denuclearization talks stalled, North Korea went ahead with more weapons tests this month. The tests were seen as a protest by Kim after Trump rejected his calls for sanctions relief at the Hanoi summit.

North Korea has said the ship seizure violated the spirit of the summit and demanded the return of the vessel without delay.

The U.S. Justice Department said the North Korean cargo ship, known as the "Wise Honest", was seized and impounded to American Samoa. The vessel was accused of illicit coal shipments in violation of sanctions and was first detained by Indonesia in April 2018.

U.S. faking insecurity in Iraq: New strategy to push Baghdad into compliance

1→ In this statement, Washington has claimed that its citizens might be at risk of terrorism, abduction and armed clashes in Iraq.

The statement has also warned that American citizens or companies in Iraq might be at risk of attacks with home-made explosives and bombs Even in Bagdad.

U.S. has also evicted some of its embassy staff, claiming that they might be at "high risk".

It seems that U.S. officials are trying to present Iraq as an unstable country where people are exposed to many risks and threats. U.S. knows perfectly that by enforcing such a picture, it might be able to push Iraq into accepting its demands. One of the most important ones of these demands is for Iraq to imply with U.S. sanctions on Iran.

Iraq, however, has so far given a firm response by rejecting this demand, something that has greatly angered the White House.

Iraq will remain part of 'axis of resistance' despite foreign plots: al-Kaabi

1→ Washington has commonly described the popular Iraqi forces as being "Iran-backed proxies", despite being formally funded and incorporated into Iraq's security forces.

Groups such as the Harakat al-Nujaba are part of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), a combination of some 40 groups formed shortly after the emergence of the Daesh terrorist group in Iraq in 2014.

Since the early days of the Daesh's reign of terror, the PMU-aligned forces have played a major role in reinforcing the Iraqi army, which had suffered heavy setbacks in the face of initial lightning advances of the terrorists.

Daesh has currently been effectively vanquished in Iraq and Syria, with only few remaining cells operating in isolated desert areas.

'Iraqi parl. to vote on bill banning U.S. military presence'

TEHRAN — The Iraqi parliament is set to vote on a draft bill that would ban the United States-led military presence in Iraq, a report says.



The draft bill, which stipulates the expulsion of all foreign forces from Iraq but which focuses specifically on dislodging American forces, is scheduled for a vote on Saturday, Iraq's al-Ma'lomah news website reported.

According to Press TV, the U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003, claiming that then-Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and sought to use them against the U.S. Combat forces pulled out of the country in 2011, nominally ending the war. However, thousands of American and other troops remain in the country to allegedly provide logistics and training to Iraqi forces.

Many politicians across Iraq's political landscape have questioned the foreign military presence in the country over the years. Calls for a withdrawal of foreign forces have grown following the defeat of the Daesh terrorist group in Iraq in 2018.

Speaking about the draft bill due for a vote, Karim Alivi, a member of the Iraqi parliament's national security and defense committee, said on Thursday that the country's two biggest parliamentary factions — the Sairoon bloc, led by Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Fatah alliance, headed by secretary general of the Badr Organization, Hadi al-Ameri — supported the document.

The Iraqi lawmaker predicted that the draft text would gain the required majority needed for it to become law, given the two parliamentary blocs' support.

More recently, as speculation grew about potential U.S. military aggression against Iran, Iraqi figures, including Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi, emphasized that U.S. forces would not be allowed to use Iraqi territory to launch any attacks on Iran if a war did break out.

Boris Johnson clear favorite among UK Conservative members to succeed PM May

Boris Johnson, a prominent leader of the Brexit campaign and former foreign minister, is the top choice among members of Britain's ruling Conservative Party to replace Theresa May as prime minister, according to a poll.

Johnson is the first choice among 39 percent of party members, followed by former Brexit minister Dominic Raab in second place on 13 percent, according to the survey by YouGov for The Times newspaper.

May has said she will agree a timetable for the election of her successor after she puts her Brexit deal to a parliamentary vote in the week of June 3.

Conservative Party members are due to have the final say on who the next leader will be after the wide field of anticipated candidates is whittled down to just two names.

Protesters take to streets of paris on 27th week of yellow vests rallies

TEHRAN — France's Yellow Vest protesters were taking to the streets for the 27th weekend in a row.

Enthusiasm for the Yellow Vest movement seems to be cooling after a historic low, last week, of some 18,600 people participating (figure by the Ministry of the Interior).

Tens of thousands have marched in the streets of France every Saturday since November 2018, for a variety of grievances ranging from taxes on fuel to income inequality.

In addition to protesting in France, the Yellow Vests have been spotted in other parts of Europe.

In Pantin, in the northeast of Paris, Yellow Vest organisers called on teachers and parents to join the march and at the

Place de la République, a massive protest demonstration against producer of genetically modified food Monsanto is planned, coinciding with a gathering by the Yellow Vests' "National Council of Resistance" that is organising a poll where participants can participate in "the first vote/opinion poll" on the movement.

The event of the day will be a march starting at 13:00 at La Défence that will eventually end at the Sacré Coeur.

This specific march was organised by Inda Inda, Nejeh Ben Farhat and Jean Christian Valentin. In a message on Demosphere, an online agenda for all protest gatherings, organisers specifically call upon women to participate, saying

that they are "always present, but always in the background," that they are "equivalent to determination," and "always mobilised in spite of increasing repression" against them.

The Paris police announced that all Yellow Vest gatherings will be forbidden on the Champs Elysées with a circle that also covers the Presidential palace and the buildings of the General Assembly, as well as a sector surrounding the Notre Dame de Paris during the whole day.

Meanwhile, demonstrators are not allowed to use objects meant to "completely or partly" cover their face in "order to be unrecognisable" and impromptu police inspections of bags at sites where demonstrations are allowed are possible.

Marquez claims Le Mans pole

World champion Marc Marquez took pole for Sunday's French MotoGP with Ducati duo Danilo Petrucci and Jack Miller joining the Honda rider on the Le Mans front row.

Saturday's qualifying was staged in changeable conditions which made tyre choice a complex affair, as underlined by Marquez posting the fastest lap only to then fall off his bike.

The Spaniard quickly climbed back on board to continue unscathed.

French fans eager to see home hope Fabio Quartararo replicate his fine performance in qualifying in Jerez a fortnight ago, when the 20-year-old became the youngest rider to take pole in a MotoGP, were left disappointed.

The Yamaha-SRT rookie will set off from 10th on the grid. *(Source: AFP)*

Ibrahimovic gets 2-match ban for Johnson scrap



Zlatan Ibrahimovic has been suspended two games for violent conduct after grabbing goalkeeper Sean Johnson by the neck during last weekend's 2-0 loss to New York City FC, MLS' disciplinary committee announced on Friday.

The 37-year-old was also fined an undisclosed amount. Ibrahimovic will miss Sunday's home game against the Colorado Rapids, as well as the May 24 match at Orlando City. The Galaxy are attempting to halt a three-game losing streak. Ibrahimovic is second in MLS with nine goals in 10 games this season to go along with two assists. Carlos Vela leads the league with 13 goals in 13 games.

The incident took place in the 86th minute, following a sequence in which Ibrahimovic hit the crossbar with a shot and the rebound attempt was put over the goal by Chris Pontius. NYCFC keeper Sean Johnson bumped into Ibrahimovic after the play was over, with the Galaxy forward turning around and grabbing Johnson by the neck before both players fell to the ground. Both players were cautioned and after the final whistle continued jawing with one another.

The confrontation with Johnson is just the latest incident in which Ibrahimovic has been at the center. He was recently fined an undisclosed amount for diving in the May 8 defeat to the Columbus Crew. The former Manchester United and Milan player also made news the prior weekend for alleged verbal threats and a post-match confrontation with Real Salt Lake defender Nedom Onuoha. *(Source: ESPN)*

Griezmann, Godin say goodbye as Atletico held

Atletico Madrid came back from two goals and a man down to draw 2-2 at Levante on Saturday in their final La Liga game of the season which was also the last stand for departing long-time club servants Diego Godin and Antoine Griezmann.

Atletico dominated the play but were picked off on the counter-attack by Levante, who took the lead in the sixth minute through Erick Cabaco and doubled it later in the first half when Roger Marti pounced on a misplaced pass by Thomas Parthey.

Argentine winger Angel Correa was shown a straight red card early in the second half for kicking out at an opponent but midfielder Rodri drilled a scorching shot into the top corner from outside the box in the 68th minute.

Teenage debutant Sergio Camello completed the comeback in the 79th minute with a strike from close range, ensuring Atletico ended the campaign second in the standings with 76 points, 10 behind champions Barcelona. *(Source: Soccernet)*

Konta stuns Bertens to reach Italian Open final

Britain's Johanna Konta fought back from a set down to seal victory on her fourth match point against Kiki Bertens to reach the final at the Italian Open.

Konta, ranked 42, came through 5-7, 7-5, 6-2 against sixth seed Bertens, winner of the Madrid Open last week, after almost three hours on the red clay of Rome.

Dutchwoman Bertens had advanced to the semi-finals after world number one Naomi Osaka of Japan retired with a hand injury before their match Friday.

Konta next meets either Czech fourth seed Karolina Pliskova or Greek qualifier Maria Sakkari, who beat the British number one on clay in the final of the Moroccan Open earlier this month.

In the men's semi-finals, world number one Novak Djokovic plays Argentine Diego Schwartzman after surviving two match points in a thrilling three-set tussle late into the night against Juan Martin del Potro on Friday.

Defending champion Rafael Nadal has not dropped a set yet with the eight-time winner setting up a rematch with Greek rising star Stefanos Tsitsipas for a place in the final.

Tsitsipas stunned Nadal in last week's Madrid Open semi-finals before falling to Djokovic, but lost to the Spaniard in the Australian Open semis earlier this year.

Tsitsipas advanced after Roger Federer -- returning to play after a two-year absence -- retired with a right leg injury before their clash in the final warm-up before the French Open gets underway at Roland Garros next weekend. *(Source: AFP)*

Dirk Nowitzki becomes China 2019 global ambassador, joining Yao and Kobe

Former German national team and NBA superstar Dirk Nowitzki on Thursday was revealed as a global ambassador for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019.

Nowitzki becomes the third global sporting icon to be named an ambassador of the first-ever 32-team World Cup, joining Yao Ming and Kobe Bryant.

Nowitzki has had an illustrious playing career for Germany and consistently was a star performer at FIBA competitions for the better part of two decades (1999-2015).

In 2002, he led his country to its best-ever result at the World Cup, a third-place finish - the nation's only medal/podium at the world level (World Cup and Olympic Games). He was named the tournament's MVP and was its top scorer, averaging 24 points a game.

Three years later, Nowitzki spearheaded Germany's run to the Final of FIBA EuroBasket 2005 before they eventually had to settle for second place behind Greece.

The following year, the 7ft (2.13m) forward registered his best-ever individual scoring performance for the national team in an official game as he poured in 47 points in a 108-103 overtime win over Angola during the Group Phase of the 2006 World Cup in Japan.

In 2008, he led Germany to the Final of the FIBA Olympic Qualifying Tournament, thereby securing the country's place in the Olympic Basketball Tournament at the Beijing Games and ending a 16-year absence from the Olympics. He served as the flagbearer for Germany's delegation during the Opening Ceremony in the Bird's Nest. In 2011, after leading the Dallas Mavericks to a first-ever NBA championship - and earning NBA Finals MVP honors - he returned to the German national team at EuroBasket in Lithuania. He would go on to make his final appearance for his country



in the 2015 edition of Europe's biggest basketball competition, playing on home soil in the German capital of Berlin. Earlier this month, Nowitzki brought the curtain down on his illustrious 21-year NBA playing career - the entirety of which he spent with the Mavericks.

He is one of the greatest players to have ever played in FIBA competitions and was a trail blazer in showing that big players could do more than play in the low post by being an unstoppable threat out on the perimeter.

As a global ambassador, Nowitzki will help promote the World Cup by taking part in activities on the Road to China 2019 as well as being present at the first-ever 32-team edition of FIBA's flagship competition.

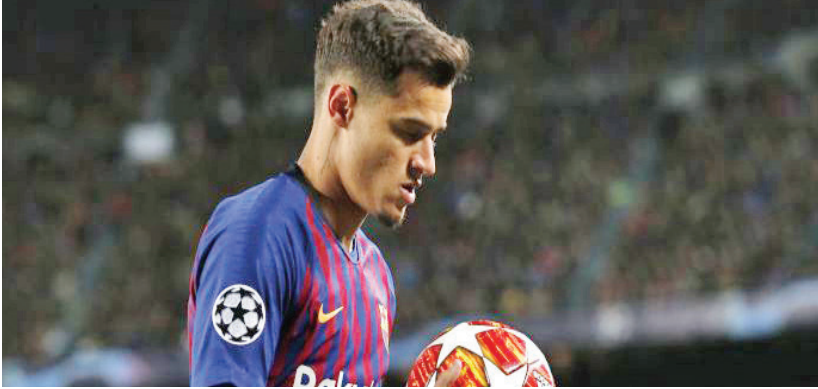
Nowitzki said: "I'm very excited to become an ambassador for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019. It's an honor to join Yao Ming and

Kobe Bryant, some of my contemporaries and biggest rivals, in taking up this prestigious role.

"I have so many great memories of playing in basketball's top competitions. Wearing the national team jersey and representing my country in FIBA competitions has always been a source of immense pride for me. I have been fortunate to perform on the world's biggest stages - at World Cups, Olympic Games and EuroBaskets. Helping Germany finish third at the World Cup in Indianapolis in 2002 ranks among the best moments in my career.

"Over the past two decades, I have personally seen the level of play in the international game evolve and grow. A World Cup with 32 teams can bring national team basketball to a level that has never been reached before and can be the most competitive event ever." FIBA Secretary General Andreas Zagklis

Liverpool should re-sign Coutinho - Carragher



Philippe Coutinho should be on Liverpool's transfer radar this summer if they get a chance to re-sign him from Barcelona, according to the club's former captain Jamie Carragher.

Coutinho left for Camp Nou in 2018's January transfer window for an initial £105m (rising to £142m) but has struggled in Spain and has been repeatedly linked with a return to the Premier League.

Sources told ESPN FC that Barcelona would accept an offer of around £90m and Carragher claims that the Brazil international would be the perfect player for Liverpool.

"I wouldn't say I would be actively going to get him, but if there was a possibility of bringing Coutinho back for decent money, and Barca wanted to cut their losses a little bit because it hasn't worked out, then I'd do that," Carragher told the Liverpool Echo.

"Would he be welcomed back? I'm not sure. But he should be. I don't see any reason why he shouldn't be. I know he got a little bit of stick when he came back [with Barcelona for the Champions League semifinal earlier this month] because he wanted to move.

"But [Xabi] Alonso wanted to move to Real Madrid, [Luis] Suarez wanted to move to Barcelona, and we still loved them

when they went.

"Sometimes we pick and choose who we love when they leave. Nobody forced any player to go to Real Madrid or Barcelona, [Javier] Mascherano is another one. Suarez only got stick when he came back because of his antics in the first game [against Liverpool], if he hadn't done that then he'd be adored when he came back. What's the difference between him and Coutinho?"

Liverpool finished second in the Premier League this season behind Man City, with a club-record 97 points and will play the Champions League final against Tottenham on June 1. But, after failing to land Lyon midfielder Nabil Fekir, Carragher believes the club miss a central attacking midfielder.

"We lack that player in the squad," he added. "We have it in [Adam] Lallana and [Xherdan] Shaqiri, but this is a different level of player.

"It's the one thing Man City have on us, they have Bernardo Silva, David Silva, Kevin De Bruyne. We don't have that type of player. We have great midfield players who are all very similar. We could add something a little bit different. But that would only really be if it was a good price for us." *(Source: ESPN)*

Boxing body faces Olympic inquiry team before Tokyo ruling



GENEVA (AP) — The embattled amateur boxing federation faces an Olympic inquiry on Monday fearing it could be punished for forcing out a longtime IOC member as its president.

For the first time in a six-month probe, International Boxing Association (AIBA) officials will sit down with the three-member investigation panel. It will wrap a six-month probe of AIBA's reformed leadership, finances, judging and refereeing of bouts, and report Wednesday to the IOC.

The International Olympic Committee's executive board is expected to take AIBA out of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics boxing tournaments.

It is unclear if the inquiry team — led by board member Nenad Lalovic, the Olympic wrestling body's president — will recommend specific next steps.

"We have grave concerns about my partner (the IOC) during this whole process," Virgets said, suggesting the IOC is still unhappy at AIBA ousting "one of their own" as president.

During the 11-year AIBA presidency of C.K. Wu, an IOC member since 1988, doubts were expressed over financial management and the integrity of Olympic bout results.

The IOC increased scrutiny after Wu resigned in 2017 under pressure from AIBA

said: "It is a great privilege and honor for FIBA to have an icon like Dirk Nowitzki join Yao Ming and Kobe Bryant as a global ambassador for the FIBA Basketball World Cup in China.

"Dirk has consistently held a leading role at top FIBA national team competitions, representing Germany with pride and commitment. He has performed for his team as the superstar that he is, always leaving fans and spectators in awe and wanting to see more. He is among the very best players in the history of international basketball and we're thrilled to have him be a part of the historic event that is China 2019."

Nowitzki's appointment as a global ambassador is one of the many tangible results of the fruitful cooperation between FIBA and FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 Global Partner Nike, the brand endorsed by the former player throughout his illustrious career.

Announcing Nowitzki as the third global ambassador is the latest in an impressive list of exciting milestones that have taken place on the Road to China 2019.

Previous ones have included: unveiling Yao Ming as the first ambassador; revealing the competition's logo and mascot; the World Cup Qualifiers played over the course of 16 months (November 2017-February 2019) to determine the 31 participating teams joining hosts China; marking 1 year to the start of China 2019 with the presentation of Tissot countdown clocks in all eight host cities; revealing Kobe Bryant as the second ambassador; unveiling the competition's official ball and holding a star-studded draw; launching sales of tickets.

Before the competition tips off on August 31, more exciting activities will take place, including the launch of the Trophy Tour. *(Source: Fiba. Basketball)*

De Bruyne has no sympathy for Liverpool over narrow title miss

Manchester City star Kevin De Bruyne understands Liverpool players being disappointed at falling just short of winning the Premier League title but he does not have any sympathy for them.

The 27-year-old Liverpool midfielder says simply his side were better than Liverpool.

City, who face Watford in the FA Cup final on Saturday chasing a historic domestic treble, retained their title by a point from Liverpool.

De Bruyne says no one would have felt sorry for City when they lost to Tottenham Hotspur in the Champions League quarter-final.

"No," he said this week when asked did he have sympathy for Liverpool. "It's a remarkable effort but it means that we were just better than them in the end.

"I don't feel sorry for them because I don't think they'd feel sorry for us. "I don't think anybody felt sorry about the way we went out of the Champions League."

He played a less influential role than in City's 2017/18 title triumph, starting just 11 league matches with bit parts in eight others due to two serious knee injuries and then a



hamstring problem.

De Bruyne, who had a superb 2018 being named City's player of the 2017/18 season and then sparked for Belgium as they finished a best ever third in the World Cup, says Liverpool feeling sore is understandable.

"I know how they feel because you're going to feel disappointed," said De Bruyne, who is fit for selection for the

Cup final.

"We'd feel the same if it happened to us. But we're still competitors. We want to win as much as they do but I can understand the feelings they have."

De Bruyne, whose high point in what he admits has "not been the most fun season" has come off the pitch with his second son being born, is a great believer in football being played through emotions.

However, he says the introduction of VAR -- it was that which cost City victory over Spurs in the Champions League as Raheem Sterling's late goal was ruled out for offside -- is removing that ingredient from the game.

"For me football is still a game of emotions," he said.

"I don't like how people try to take emotions out of the game, because what it's about is having fun, enjoying.

"If you win you're happy, if you lose you are sad. And that's what it's all about.

"That's why I also don't like the new things like VAR because it takes, for me, all the passion out and it becomes more -- you need be more like a robot these days." *(Source: AFP)*

Yahya Golmohammadi named Iran U23 football coach: official

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Yahya Golmohammadi has been named as Iran U-23 football team head coach, Mehdi Taj, the president of the Football Federation of Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI), announced that.

Golmohammadi made history this season, sending Padideh to the 2020 AFC Champions League for the first time.

Now, Taj says he has reached an agreement with Golmohammadi to part ways with Padideh to take charge of Iran U23 football team.

Golmohammadi will replace Zlatko Kranjcar who was fired as head coach of Iran U23 football team in early May after one year in charge.

The Persians earned a spot in the AFC U23 Championship Thailand 2020 Final in late March under coaching of the 62-year-old Croat but the Iranian officials are not satisfied with the way Iran qualified for the tournament.

The 2020 AFC U23 Championship will be held in Thailand from Jan. 8 to 26.

The competition will be the fourth edition of the AFC U23 Championship, the biennial international age-restricted football championship organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the men's under-23 national teams of Asia. The tournament will be held from Jan. 8 to 26, 2020 in Thailand.

The top three teams of the tournament will qualify for the 2020 Summer Olympics men's football tournament in Japan as the AFC representatives.

Iran, a powerhouse of the Asian football, have not been in the Olympics since the 1976 games in Munich.



Javad Nekounam in the frame for Tractor Sazi job: report



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Former Iran national football team captain Javad Nekounam is reportedly in the frame to be Tractor Sazi coach.

Nekounam most recently was coach of Iranian top-flight football team Nassaji.

Belgian coach Georges Leekens is no longer Tractor Sazi coach and Tabriz based football club are going to work with an Iranian coach.

Zob Ahan coach Alireza Mansourian is also a candidate to take charge of the team but he will have to lead his team in the AFC Champions League Round of 16.

Tractor Sazi also negotiated with former Saipa coach Ali Daei but the negotiations have stalled over the contract.

Tractor Sazi finished in fifth place in Iran Professional League.

Iran's NOC secretary general Shahnazi arrested



S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Shahrokh Shahnazi, secretary general of Iran's National Olympic Committee, has been arrested over allegations of financial misconduct.

Shahnazi was pursued by creditors and the committee should replace him another secretary general as soon as possible.

The 2020 Summer Olympic Games are barely a year away, and the

Iranian athletes are preparing for the prestigious event.

On Wednesday, Iranian judicial authorities arrested him and are handling the case according to law.

Shahnazi, who was appointed as NOC secretary general in 2013, was chef de mission of Iran delegation at the 2000 Summer Olympic Games in Sydney and 2014 Asian Games in Incheon.

Paralympic medalist Jawad turns down treatment in bid for Tokyo 2020 qualification

British powerlifter Ali Jawad has turned down treatment for Crohn's disease to boost his chances of qualifying for next year's Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

The 30-year-old, silver medalist in the under 59 kilograms category at the 2016 Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, told BBC Radio Five Live having the treatment could have forced him to retire.

The double amputee athlete said his medication was not working and he was given a choice between a stem cell trial which involved "aggressive chemotherapy" or a stomach bag.

"Both options looked like I might have to retire, so I decided to reject both and try to fight it all the way," the 2014 world champion said.

"Sometimes it's mind over matter – when you're so used to that amount of pain on a daily basis it becomes the norm and, with some of the days that are less painful, you don't



take them for granted.

"I knew it was going to be like this and with the option I took, I knew it would be one hell of a fight and I don't regret it."

Jawad would need to be ranked inside the top eight to secure a place at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics.

The double Commonwealth Games bronze medalist, a member of the Global Athlete group which has been among those to call for increased representation for athletes, said he was confident of qualification.

"There is still fight in me but we'll see how the next 10 to 12 weeks go," he said.

"I want to retire on my terms and not on Crohn's terms – for me it is the burning desire to retire with happiness and not regret."

(Source: insidethegames)

I expected more from myself, Brighton winger Jahanbakhsh says

Alireza Jahanbakhsh says he hasn't shown his best form for Brighton & Hove Albion yet and admitted he expected more from himself in his first season in England.

The Iranian winger joined the Seagulls for a club record fee, reported to be £17m, last summer but failed to register a goal or assist in a campaign which he said had 'a lot of ups and downs'.

A hamstring injury and the Asian Cup saw Jahanbakhsh miss three months of the season from November to February before he started eight of Albion's final 11 Premier League matches.

Reflecting on his debut campaign in England, the 25-year-old said: "It was a little bit up and down, to be honest. At the beginning I was trying to get into the team as soon as possible and play games.

"Obviously, as everyone knows, I played a couple of games and then got an unexpected injury. It took me out for a while and then I had the Asian Cup. There were some things which kept me away from playing games.

"The last couple of games I played, made progress and got used to the competition.

"The Premier League is a high quality league and different to what I'm used to.

It (the season) wasn't what I'd planned for and what I was expecting from myself but it's gone.

"I'll have a good pre-season hopefully and will have a good season (next year) which I expect from myself and what everyone expects from me."

Jahanbakhsh admitted his season left him unsatisfied and he said: "It was tough getting used to a new environment and moving to somewhere with a totally different culture and facing new stuff, which I've never been challenged with.

"There were a lot of ups and downs but there were a lot of times I enjoyed and played a lot of minutes.

"But it wasn't something which makes me satisfied, nor the fans and people who expect more from me.

"I know the reason why I'm here and I was expecting more from myself obviously. I wanted to play more, be important for the team statistically but that was something which didn't happen this season.

"Next season I'm going to work with double energy and with the mindset of what I have from the Premier League right now. Hopefully I'll bring more quality to the team and show



what I can do."

Jahanbakhsh, who played 24 times in all competitions, feels Brighton fans are still to see the best of him: "Definitely, There's been some games I've really enjoyed playing with my team-mates but my best hasn't happened yet obviously.

"I expect more of myself and I know I can show more. That's the reason I'm not really happy with this season.

"It has gone and next season I'm going to do everything to get into the best shape."

Brighton finished 17th in the Premier League and also reached the FA Cup semi-finals in Jahanbakhsh's first season with the club.

He said: "For the team it wasn't that bad a season. The last seven, eight, ten games it's been a little bit difficult with being down there and stressing about relegation.

"We made it difficult for ourselves because there was a stage of the season where we were 11th, 12th position in the table. We'd been doing a great job and got to the semi-finals of the FA Cup.

"We lost a few points which made it more difficult in the last couple of games but luckily we are staying in the Premier League.

"We have to plan for next season which we know is going to be even more difficult. We are going to do our best to have good preparation in pre-season and to have a good season."

Jahanbakhsh now has a rare summer off with no international commitments and he said: "Now is a good time to have some time off, refresh my mind and come back in good shape for pre-season."

(Source: brightonandhoveindependent.co.uk)

Iranian female badminton player invited to top Asia event

IRNA — Iranian female badminton player Sorayya Aghaei has been invited to an international training camp in Asia out of the top 20 Asian badminton players.

She will be accompanied by Vietnamese, Burmese, Kazakh and Jordanian badminton players at the event.

They have been chosen for their top performance at the Asian Olympic Project (AOP).

The players will take part in Russian and Bulgarian competitions.

AFC match officials appointed for Persepolis and Esteghlal

Hettikamkanamge Dilan Perera from Sri Lanka has been chosen to officiate the match between Persepolis of Iran and Qatar's Al Sadd.

Persepolis will host Al Sadd in Group D of the AFC Champions League Matchday Six on Monday in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Perera will be assisted by his two countrymen.

Hettikamkanamge Dilan Perera, 39, is a Sri Lankan professional football referee. He has been a full international for FIFA since 2004. Perera has refereed some matches in AFC Champions League.

Also, South Korean referee Ko Hyung-jin has been chosen to take charge of the match between Al Ain of the UAE and Iran's Esteghlal.

The 37-year-old referee has already officiated two matches for Iran's Zob Ahan.

The South Korean referee has been a full international referee for FIFA from 2009. Ko Hyung-jin will be assisted by his countrymen.

Al Ain will host Esteghlal on Monday at the Hazza bin Zayed Stadium in Al Ain.

(Source: the-afc)

Mame Baba Thiam linked with Iran's Esteghlal

TASNIM — Iranian football club Esteghlal have set its sight on signing Senegalese forward Mame Baba Thiam.

The 26-year-old striker joined Ajman in August 2018 after leaving Esteghlal but he is reportedly not satisfied with his condition in the Emirati football team.

Now, Esteghlal, who finished third in Iran Professional League, have reportedly opened negotiations with Thiam.

Thiam scored 12 goals in all competitions in 13 appearances for Esteghlal and became so popular among the Iranian team's fans, but left the team due to financial terms.

Esteghlal are going to sign Thiam once again but he is under contract with the Emirati football team until 2020.

Al Nassr win thrilling Saudi Pro League title race

Rui Vitória's Al Nassr were crowned 2018-19 Saudi Pro League champions after their 2-1 over Al-Batin on Thursday ensured they finished a point above Al Hilal to claim their eighth league title.

The race for the Saudi Pro League title went down to the wire, with Al Hilal chasing their third title in a row and needing a win against Al-Shabab, provided Al Nassr slipped up against Al Batin - to seal the title.

Al Hilal did their part to stay in contention when they dug deep to defeat Al Shabab 3-2 at home, but Al Nassr had other ideas as Abderrazak Hamdallah's brace was enough to see off Marius-Ciprian Panait's side 2-1 to dramatically win the title by a point.

Australian goalkeeper Brad Jones played an integral part in Al Nassr's march to the title, keeping an impressive 11 clean sheets.

Jones started in goal for all but five league matches this season, including the 2-1 win over Al-Batin that sealed the title.

It's the fifth trophy of the 37-year-old journeyman, adding to his English League Cup won with Liverpool and the Eredivisie title, Dutch Cup and Super Cup won during his time at Feyenoord.

In 2019 AFC Champions League action, Al Nassr will face Group A winners Zob Ahan on Matchday Six with both teams having already confirmed their place in the knockout stage of the competition.

(Source: the-afc)

Samoan Prime Minister targets place in archery competition at Pacific Games

Samoa Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi is targeting a place in the country's archery team for the upcoming Pacific Games.

The Prime Minister previously competed at the Games in 2007, when the Games last took place in Samoa.

He became the first Prime Minister to compete in an international sports competition when he participated in the event. Tuilaepa hopes to repeat the feat by securing a place in the country's archery team.

The 74-year-old stated he would still need to earn his place in the team.

"I am not a walk in," Tuilaepa said.

"There is no preferential treatment here and I am treated like any other competitor.

"Earning the right to represent your country at any international sporting event is the highest honor that any person can ask for. "And I will make the final cut to compete in the Pacific Games on my own team power.

"In my book, I have already won gold for Samoa as the oldest athlete to compete in the Games."

The Games are due to take place from July 7 to 20 in Apia.

(Source: insidethegames)

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GUIDE TO
SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

The first benefit which a patient man gets from his forbearance is that the people aid him against the ignorant.

Imam Ali (AS)

Troupe to give reading of Ibsen’s “Catiline” at Tehran theater

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — A group of actors will perform a reading of Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen’s first play “Catiline” or “Catilina” at Tehran’s City Theater Complex today.

The reading performance, which is scheduled to be staged at the Mashahir Hall of the complex at 6:30 pm, will be directed by Yasaman Talebi who is also the translator of the play.



Front cover of Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen’s first play “Catiline”.

Iraj Tadayyon, Mehdi Zarreh, Mahshid Zebardast, Mohaddeseh Seifi, Maryam Saburi, Hassan Asgari, Mohammad Moradifar and Hossein Mirhashemi are the members of the cast.

Admission is free for all.

The main character in this historical drama, which is in blank verse, is the noble Roman Lucius Catilina, based on the historical figure of Catiline. He is torn between two women, his wife Aurelia and the vestal virgin Furia.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ebrahiminejad Gallery observes International Museum Day

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Veteran painter Ali-Akbar Ebrahiminejad showcased a large collection of his works in an exhibition at Ebrahiminejad Gallery on Saturday to celebrate International Museum Day.

The exhibition titled “Iran: A Diverse Range of Tribes” will run for one week at the gallery located at 72 Ahang St., off Mahallati Highway.

International Museum Day has been celebrated worldwide since 1977 on or about May 18 to highlight the importance of museums and the challenges they face.

Rolling Stones to hit the road as Jagger regains swagger

LONDON (Reuters) — The Rolling Stones will hit the road again this summer after rescheduling their North American “No Filter” tour, which was postponed when lead singer Mick Jagger needed medical treatment.



Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones performs during a concert of their “No Filter” European tour at the Orange Velodrome stadium in Marseille, France, June 26, 2018. (Reuters/Jean-Paul Pelissier)

The 75-year-old, who media reports said had undergone heart valve replacement surgery in New York earlier in the spring, showed fans he had regained his swagger on Wednesday, breaking into his well-known dance moves in a video shared on Twitter.

“Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Charlie Watts and Ronnie Wood can’t wait to get back out on the road again,” the band said in a tour statement on Thursday, with the rescheduled performances now due to kick off in Chicago on June 21.

Known for hits like “Brown Sugar” and “Sympathy For The Devil”, the veteran rock band said all U.S. and Canadian cities from the postponed shows were “locked in”.

“No Filter”, which now has an added show in New Orleans, will play in cities across the United States as well as in Ontario, Canada before wrapping up on Aug. 31 in Miami.

Iranian cinema shines at Argentine labor film festival

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Several movies from Iran have won awards at the Construir Cine International Labor Film Festival in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the organizers have announced.

“The Respectful Gypsy” by Mehdi Ghafari was crowned best short fiction at the event, which took place in the capital city of Argentina from May 9 to 15.

The film is about a group of gypsy women packed like animals in the back of a truck, which goes to the city center every day to sell all kinds of goods and products to drivers who stop at traffic lights. However, behind this itinerant street work, there is a man who runs the business and ends up taking most of the profits. The male chauvinism, the constant debt, and the enslaving force of this practice mean that the vendors do not find economic freedom that will allow them to escape in the future from the circle of violence to which they are being subjected.

“Breathing” by Frashid Ayyubinejad won a mention of merit in this section.

The movie tells the story of a group of Iranian men who, without medical care or protection from any regulatory body, earn their living working in a stone factory. They have to hide each time the insurance agent arrives. Confined in a small room while waiting to return to their posts, those dissatisfied with their working conditions consider the idea of rebelling against the manager and leaving the job. As the minutes pass, the tension in the bunker increases, claustrophobia spreads and the atmosphere thickens. One of them suffers an asthma attack, but little by little the air becomes scarce for everyone.

Director Rebwar Mahmudpur’s documentary “A Step to Go” received a mention of excellence in the short documentary category.

The film is about Saman, an Iranian son who has to leave his parents’ house to take a new path and continue his studies outside the country. The definitive decision was a pivotal and painful fact for the family. The sadness for Saman’s departure left his mother ten days without food and



A scene from director Mehdi Ghafari’s short drama “The Respectful Gypsy”.

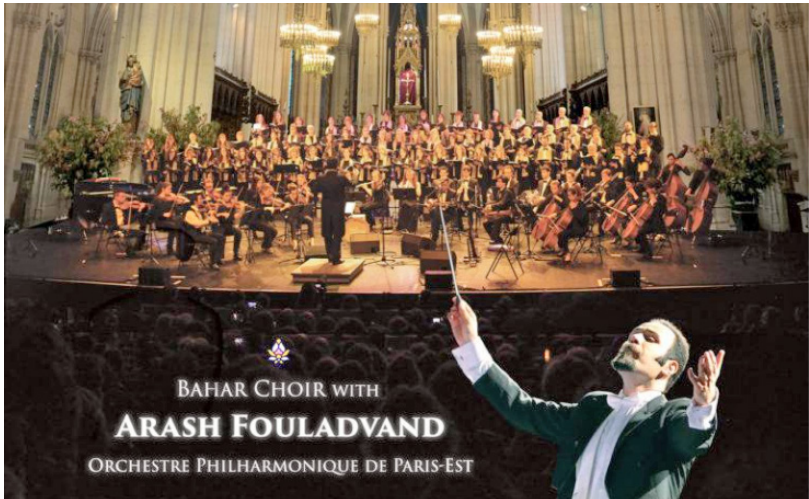
introduced an expectation to embrace him again that was put off more and more until reaching eight years. This tearful and emotional documentary goes through the rendezvous of the family circle with that member who, for a long time, was present in the form of videos and photographs stuck

in the corner of the house.

“The Tent” by Russian director Dmitrii Fetisov was selected as best short documentary.

“The Silence of the Wind” directed by Alvaro Aponte-Centeno from Puerto Rico also won the award for best film.

Iranian musician to perform with Parisian orchestra



A poster for Paris-Est Philharmonic Orchestra’s concerts “The Voice of Peace”.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian musicians will accompany the Paris-Est Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of conductor Arash Fuladvand during concerts in Paris and London, the orchestra has announced.

Tar virtuoso Keivan Saket and vocalist Vahid Taj along with the Bahar Choir will accompany the orchestra in the concerts named “The Voice of Peace”.

The Paris concerts will take place at the Basilica of Saint Clotilde on May 31 and June 1, and the London performance

will be held at the University College London (UCL) on June 9.

The choir and orchestra will come together to perform and promulgate the Iranian music, poetry and culture through the performance of well-known Iranian music and contemporary pieces.

Founded in Paris in 2010, the Paris-Est Philharmonic Orchestra is not only dedicated to classical music but also to the world music, especially Persian music. The Bahar Choir in Paris is also composed of 70 amateur or semi-professional male and female singers.

Cannes critics warm to Ken Loach’s dig at gig economy

CANNES, France (Reuters) — With the tale of a family unraveling under the pressure of their precarious jobs, Ken Loach’s latest Cannes entry takes aim at the gig economy model dividing politicians and workers the world over.

And at 82, the searing drama showed the veteran British director - who has already won the cinema showcase’s top Palme D’Or prize twice - on fine form, some critics said.

Set in the northeastern English city of Newcastle, “I’m Sorry We Missed You” charts hard-working father Ricky Turner’s efforts to keep his family together after he signs on as a self-employed delivery man, and tries to dig himself out of debt.

Life as a contractor on endless shifts soon takes its toll, however, including financially as every delay is logged onto a central electronic system - one which determines “who lives and who dies”, according to the delivery firm’s hard-nosed manager.

As small sanctions start piling up, adding to the burden Ricky has already taken on with a downpayment on his van, he works ever more doggedly, inflaming relations with his two children and his wife.

The film builds suspense as viewers also will Ricky to stop - highlighting the paradox of a labor system where, in theory at least, contractors enjoy the freedom to do as they please.

“It’s the perfect situation for the big companies. No risk and the worker has to run himself into the ground without being told to,” Loach told a news conference on Friday.



Director Ken Loach arrives at the news conference for the film “Sorry We Missed You” in competition at the 72nd Cannes Film Festival, Cannes, France, May 17, 2019. (Reuters/Stephane Mahe)

“It’s not capitalism failing. It’s capitalism working as it always will,” Loach added.

Known for his explorations of working class struggles, Ken Loach’s latest film was “very Ken-Loachian”, Cannes’ festival director Thierry Fremaux had said in April ahead of the competition.

Some reviewers, including at entertainment site The Wrap, bemoaned a lack of fresh ground in the director’s repertoire.

But in the age of ride-hailing services like Uber, or food delivery firms that rely on contractors - increasingly under scrutiny over the protections offered to workers - the movie managed to land its punches well, others said.

“It radiates a timeliness that suggests an old-fashioned Ken Loach lament matters more than ever,” IndieWire critic Eric Kohn wrote.

Art show celebrates Ramadan at Iranian Artists Forum



Art aficionados visit the 6th Art Feast at the Iranian Artists Forum in June 2018.

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The 7th Art Feast displaying a collection of drawings by young artists opened at all the galleries of the Iranian Artists Forum on Friday to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan.

The exhibition showcases a selection of 300 works by artists from different Iranian cities to provide new insight into the art of drawings across the country.

A number of workshops will also be organized on the sidelines of the exhibition at the Mommayez Gallery of the forum. In addition, art scholars

will be attending panel discussions during the event.

The participants will be more familiar with different techniques of modern drawings, while a selection of films on drawings will be screened.

The artworks are offered at reasonable prices to help visitors purchase beautiful artworks to bring home, IAF director Majid Rajab-Memmar has said.

The exhibit will be running until June 11 at the forum located on Musavi St., off Taleqani Ave.

Architect I.M. Pei dies at age 102

NEW YORK (Reuters) — I.M. Pei, whose modern designs and high-profile projects made him one of the best-known and most prolific architects of the 20th century, has died, the New York Times reported on Thursday. He was 102.

Pei, whose portfolio included a controversial renovation of Paris’ Louvre Museum and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, died overnight, his son Chien Chung Pei told the newspaper.

Jeoh Ming Pei, the son of a prominent banker in China, left his homeland in 1935, moving to the United States and studying architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. After teaching and working for the U.S. government, he went to work for a New York developer in 1948 and started his own firm in 1955.

The museums, municipal buildings, hotels, schools and other structures that Pei built around the world showed precision geometry and an abstract quality with a reverence for light. They were composed of stone, steel and glass and, as with the Louvre, he often worked glass pyramids into his projects.

The Louvre, parts of which date to the 12th century, proved to be Pei’s most controversial work, starting with the fact that he was not French. After being chosen for the job by President Francois Mitterrand amid much secrecy, Pei began by making a four-month study of the museum and French history.

He created a futuristic 70-foot-tall (21-m) steel-framed, glass-walled pyramid as a grand entrance for the museum with three smaller pyramids nearby. It was a



Despite early condemnation by critics, the Louvre’s monumental glass pyramid, designed by the Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei (above), is credited with helping to boost visitor numbers from 3.5 million in 1989 to more than 10 million last year. (Getty Images/Bernard Bisson)

striking contrast to the existing Louvre structures in classic French style and was reviled by many French.

A French newspaper described Pei’s pyramids as “an annex to Disneyland” while an environmental group said they belonged in a desert.

Pei said the Louvre was undoubtedly the most difficult job of his career. When it opened in 1993 he said he had wanted to create a modern space that did not detract from the traditional part of the museum.

“Contemporary architects tend to impose modernity on something,” he said in an New York Times interview in 2008. “There is a certain concern for history but it’s not very deep. I understand that time has changed, we have evolved. But I don’t want to forget the beginning. A lasting architecture has to have roots.”